

# BANDWAGON

March-April 2013 • Volume 57 Number 2

REPUBLIC PICTURES presents

**Clyde Beatty**

WORLD'S GREATEST **DARKEST**

ANIMAL TRAINER **AFRICA**

*Samuel* **KING**

WORLD'S YOUNGEST ANIMAL TRAINER AND  
THE COLE BROS. BEATTY CIRCUS  
A REPUBLIC SERIAL



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ORIGINAL STORY BY  
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& TRACY KNIGHT  
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TED PARSONS

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# BANDWAGON

**The Journal of the Circus Historical Society, Inc.**

March-April 2013 • Volume 57, Number 2

**Fred D. Pfening III** ——— **Editor and Publisher**

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## Notice

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (signed by) Martha Roth Wells, 9/30/13.



## Our Cover

This colorful poster from Clyde Beatty's third movie *Darkest Africa* was printed in 1936 by Morgan Lithograph of Cleveland. Morgan didn't do much circus work. Ringling Bros. Circus was a customer in 1907 and the Ringling-Barnum show used its paper in the early 1930s. While few circuses could afford its work, movie studios called upon them frequently. For *Darkest Africa*, it produced the lithograph on our cover to advertise the entire serial and then a different bill for each of the fifteen episodes. They may be the finest posters ever printed showing Beatty. Dave Price Collection.

## Thanks

A number of people helped make this issue a reality: Maureen Brunsdale, Ron Levere, Kelly McCoy, Daniel Mulford, Ralph Pierce, Jennifer Lemmer-Posey, Richard J. Reynolds, Robert Sabia, Mark Schmitt, Pete Shrake, Debbie Walk, and Dom Yodice. Special thanks to John and Mardi Wells who are always a joy with whom to work.

## Erratum

A factual error occurred in William C. Taggart's "On Ringling-Barnum in 1955 Part I," in *Bandwagon*, November-December 2012. At the top left of page 7, it is stated that the Big Top had twenty 47' aluminum quarter poles, thirty-four 27' aluminum quarters poles, and thirty-four 37' quarter poles. This is in error. According to the 1955 Route Book, the tent had twenty 47' and thirty-four 37' aluminum quarter poles. No 27' long quarter poles were used.

Thanks to Robert Cline for catching this.

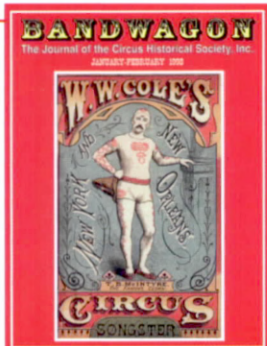
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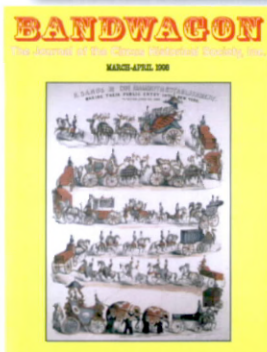
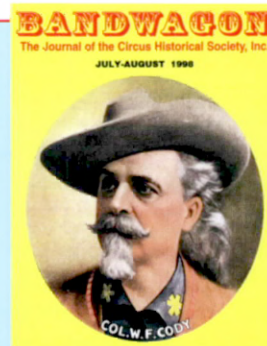
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# Cat Man Scribe

## Recalls Menagerie Misfits

Stuttering Ivy Leaguer Preferred Lions and Tigers to Humans  
on Early 1950s Ringling Animal Department

by Lane Talburt

The neophyte cage hand had no pretensions of becoming a modern-day Daniel in the lions' den.

To the contrary, Edward "Ted" Hoagland discovered it was much safer sleeping under the big cats' menagerie cages than in the open air during overnight stays on the metropolitan lots of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

There the book-wise but street-naïve Harvard undergrad was assured of protection from roving bands of toughs seeking to victimize hapless circus workers in the summers of 1951 and 1952.

"The lions would lay there with their paws stretched through the bars. And if a mugger wanted to rob me, the guy—if he hadn't been torn apart by the lions—would have had a heart attack when he snuck up and they roared at him," laughed the 80-year-old essayist and author of 25 books.

Rendered almost speechless by a severe stutter, but bolstered by experience as a veterinarian's helper and a collector of reptiles and other woodland creatures, Hoagland had just completed his freshman year in college when he walked onto the Ringling-Barnum lot in Plainville, Connecticut, on June 16, 1951. At eighteen a self-described runaway from an upper class background, Hoagland carried a letter from Ringling-Barnum winter quarters promising him a job in the show's Animal Department.

For much of the next two summers he rubbed elbows on the lot and traveled in the same smelly, racially segregated workingmen's sleeping car with the likes of drifters, ex-cons and alcoholics bearing nicknames such as Chief, Hopalong, Daff

Dust jacket from hardcover edition of *Cat Man*, 1955. Used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.



and Bible. All the while Ted was learning to tend (in some rather unusual ways) to the needs of lions, tigers, monkeys and hooved stock.

Ted quickly discovered how easy it was to impress young female visitors standing on the other side of the menagerie ropes. All he had to do was stick his arm into the gaping mouth of the hippopotamus,



Ringling-Barnum big top being stitched up shortly before being raised. Mound Street lot, Columbus, Ohio, July 7, 1951. Pfening Archives.





Ringling-Barnum ticket wagons loaded on flat car, unknown location, 1952. Pfening Archives.

then jerk it away just before the hippo clamped her jaws shut. But the girls just as quickly drifted away when the rookie was unable to utter even a brief flirtatious word.

Nor did he make many friends—outside the dozen or so men in his crew—among the 1,200 circus employees who traveled on the 70-car, three-section train (down from 79 cars on four sections the previous season). Being a scholar at a prestigious Ivy League school, Ted also didn't want to call attention to his background of privilege to circus executives such as General Manager Art Concello or President John Ringling North or his brother Henry North, who was a frequent visitor to the menagerie when visiting the show.

That didn't mean Hoagland wasn't making mental notes of the grittier side of circus life, where boozy roustabouts occasionally fell off moving flatcars, strapping elephant caretakers routinely disciplined their charges with a hefty swing of their bull hooks and the giraffes' attendant became the kept lover of the sideshow fat lady.

At the end of his two-year journey, spread over a total of five months, Hoagland took pen in hand to begin the arduous task of crafting his 310-page novel, *Cat Man*, published in 1955 (the year after his graduation) by Houghton Mifflin.

How Hoagland's first book—much-maligned at the time by circus fans and his wealthy Wall Street lawyer father—even made it into print is a compelling story in itself.

During a four-hour interview at his home on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, on April 20, 2012, Hoagland deployed the same frothy, pull-no-punches language that came out when he described life in the circus menagerie six decades ago.

This is an edited version of that dialogue with circus historian Lane Talburt.

**Q:** Let's just plunge right in. How did you get hooked up with Ringling, where you were, what you were doing at the time?

**Hoagland:** I was a freshman at Harvard, and I loved animals very much. My first job had been back home in southern Connecticut at an animal hospital—\$3 a day, if I remember, for a ten-hour day, which was fine because I loved the work. But as a freshman at college I didn't know whether I wanted to be a writer or a zoologist. And I had a bad stutter, a very bad stutter, which you can hardly notice now by comparison. And that of course was part of the reason for my focus on writing, and also on the love for animals. Because it was hard for me to talk to anyone except for

close friends—I didn't stutter much with close friends. But it limited my social life with people. Therefore I was close to dogs and reptiles and possums and the things that lived in the Connecticut woods at home. But I sort of graduated from them. Of course, I always had dogs. I still have a dog. I still have a turtle here after all these years—70 years since I had my first dog and my first turtles. I'm 79.

But as a freshman at eighteen, I figured I wanted to graduate to the so-called mega fauna, as they're called now. I didn't know the word—it hadn't been invented then—such as elephants, tigers, lions, the big stuff that was wonderful and wild. So I wrote a letter—I think

it would have been in the spring of '51—to the winter quarters of Ringling Brothers in Sarasota simply asking if I could work with animals in the circus during my summer vacation. I got a little letter back saying, "Yes. Just join whenever you can when school is over." So that was as simple as that.

Once I'd worked in the circus a while I realized that they hired people every day because they had an enormous turnover at my level. We were only paid \$14 per week for a fifteen-hour day, or a fourteen-hour day. And we slept two people to a bunk in the railroad cars, and the bunks were not like a Pullman car now, but three bunks high. So there were six people vertically bedded down at night. And at that rate of pay and under those living conditions, which at age eighteen I found perfectly comfortable, we got up at 4:30 in the morning as the train pulled into each town.

This was the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus . . . it was still operating under canvas. The big top held 11,000 people. And it had 24 elephants with us on the second train—there were three trains. We traveled on the first train that arrived first in the morning about 4:30 in each new town every day. The second train had 24 elephants and 90 horses—90 horses—for example.

It also had a special sideshow tent, which had the so-called freaks that are not really allowed anymore; you're not allowed to show people with handicaps for money now as freaks. And I agree with that. It's not that I'm complaining that there are no more freak shows. But we had the sideshow barker—what they called the talker in the circus and carnivals, saying "Our poor little legless, armless girl," who was actually a young woman probably in her early 20s who had no arms or legs. She was just a torso. And there was this gigantic Englishman, the tallest man in the world who was . . . I don't know how tall he really was—eight feet maybe. He was so tall it hurt him to walk. It was painful for him to leave his chair, so he sat on the stage all day long. And we had the fattest woman in the world, so called. We had Sealo, the seal boy, as the talker would say, and that was because he didn't have arms. His hands were directly attached to his shoulders, like seal flippers. All these sideshow attractions were nice people who talked to \$14-a-week cage hands like me.

There was also a snake charmer who, of course, was my favorite part of it because I loved snakes. I had little snakes at home—little garter snakes and ring-neck snakes, and I had purchased a bull snake from Kansas by mail and which I had kept until he escaped.



He escaped into the Connecticut woods. The climate was similar to Kansas though, so he may have survived quite a while, I hope. But of course our snake charmer was handling 12-foot pythons and boas, which she was very fond of. In fact if something happened to one of them—the temperature fell too low and they got sick—she would tear up. I mean, she cared for them. But she also had—she was Cuban and she had black hair that hung to her coccyx and I had a crush on her but couldn't speak to her because of my stutter, so I just used to gape—with my mouth closed, of course—in admiration all day, I don't mean all day. Because I had work to do. Our cages . . .



*Ringling-Barnum menagerie cages lined up near entrance to big top. The show did not carry a menagerie tent in 1951 when this image was taken. Location unknown. These cages were crafted from decommissioned World War II ammunition carriers. Dom Yodice Collection.*

well, I was a menagerie hand.

Q: Give me an idea of the menagerie tent and its size, and then how that became your world back then.

Hoagland: Well, the big top was large enough that sometimes the menagerie cages were under the big top; they were in the entrance area. They weren't always outdoors or facing the sideshow on the midway. But there were food booths on the midway for the cotton candy and other things that people go to the circus for. It was a rite of passage for—it used to be anyway—for small children to be taken by their fathers in particular. The first circus train would roll into the railroad yards, as I said, about 4:30, and the most conscientious parents would be there at dawn. And then if they stuck around, they would be there when the second train came in with all the elephants that marched or strolled or whatever words you want to use from the railroad yards to the circus lot, which was sometimes four or five miles. The circus lot would not be alongside the railroad yards as a rule because there wasn't enough space.

Q: How many cars did the train have, and how many were in each section? What did each section carry?

Hoagland: Well the third section did not come in until about 11:00 a.m., and that was the train the performers traveled on and the management and so on. And that would have the sleeping cars, some with compartments and the dining car and all that luxurious stuff; it was luxurious by our standards, not by Pullman standards.

The second train would have the animals on it, the big top and also the crew to handle the big top . . . to unroll the canvas and to push up first the side poles and quarter poles, then the center poles. And also, as I said before, the elephants were actually the muscles that provided—the muscle that pulled up the center poles and quarter poles. I think they had a machine for the center poles, but certainly the elephants pulled up the quarter poles. People couldn't have done that; they wouldn't be strong enough. It was a huge, huge tent.

Q: Tell me about. . .

Hoagland: I'm talking about my memories of, literally 60 years ago, 61 years ago to be exact, and therefore I can't say if the tent was exactly a football field long, but it was . . . what I'm trying to say is it was large enough to hold 11,000 people. And it was a long process to put it up every morning. They would start maybe about 9:00 o'clock. The canvas for the big top wouldn't have come until the second train, which would have left the last town after the first train because they had to tear the tent down and roll all the canvas up and transport the huge poles to the railroad yard and stick it on the cars. So that's why the second train didn't arrive so early in the morning if they got stuck loading up the big top. And then the performers, who were not through working until the end of the show, so they had a chance to relax and unwind before their train left, or on the train—the third train was the last one.

Q: Tell me about the menagerie. Was there not a menagerie top at that time?

Hoagland: There was never a separate menagerie top while I was there, and I'm very glad there wasn't because if there had been I would have had to help put it up or down. [Beginning with the 1951 tour,



*The Ringling-Barnum animals were often exhibited outdoors. Menagerie man with hands on mesh fence had job similar to Hoagland's. Location unknown, 1951. Dyer Reynolds photo, Dom Yodice Collection.*



the animal cages were spotted either in the open air on the midway or immediately inside the big top, the menagerie tent having been left at winter quarters as a cost-cutting measure.] No, we simply had to open up the cages' flaps that closed the cages at night from the wind and cold and so on. We closed the cages at night so we just had to open the flaps. And I usually rode around on the back of the Caterpillar tractor that pulled the cage wagons into position. The reason I rode on the back was to hook the wagons onto the Caterpillar and to unhook them when they reached the position where they were eventually located.

Q: But you weren't in charge when they were on the flats. You just hooked them on the lot, right?

Hoagland: Just on the lot. No, the train crews were in charge and they loaded everything onto the flatcars in the evening and night after teardown, and they were the ones that unloaded all those flatcars.

Q: Roughly how many cages were on the lineup?

Hoagland: That's a good question. And I can't say. Sixty-one years ago I wasn't memorizing these things in order to recount them now. [laugh] But the hippo had her own cage, and she was a favorite of ours because we could show off for the local girls by scratching the inside of her mouth. She would open her mouth—I mean a huge mouth like this [spreads hands]. And I would reach inside and scratch her tongue; she had huge tusks, of course. And I would scratch the inside of her cheeks, which she enjoyed also. So I scratched her tongue and I scratched the insides of her cheeks. And all the time I kept looking over my shoulder to see if there was a cute blonde admiring my bravery. And when the hippo got tired of having her mouth gaping open that way and she got tired of that attention, she would slightly move her jaws just very slightly but sufficiently that I felt the movement. I would pull my arm out and she would clap her jaws shut. If she hadn't warned me and she



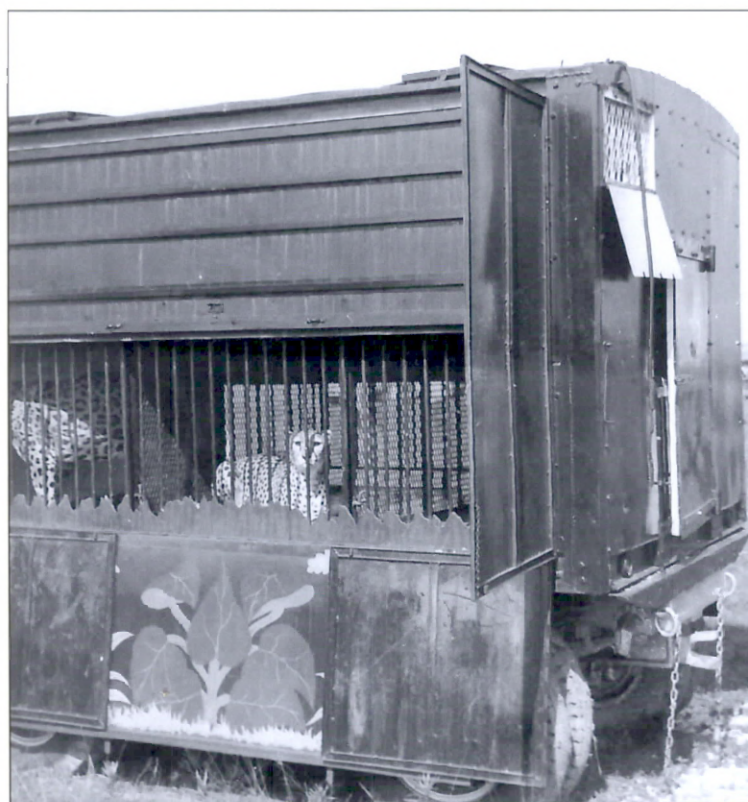
*The ammo cages, new in 1949, were radically different from the earlier wagons. This 1951 image conveys a sense of what the menagerie looked like when all the cages were unfolded. Location unknown, 1951. Dom Yodice Collection.*

wanted to tear my arm off all she would have had to do was clap her jaws shut without warning. But she liked it, and we liked her.

I've been to Africa five times, I mean in my middle age, and I saw how the tickbirds fly inside the mouths of hippos in those lakes and pick out the ticks that are inside their mouths, clean them out for the hippos. And so what we were doing—no more than a couple of us were confident enough to do this, because we were taking care of the hippo. I mean we knew her and she knew us. She had her own

cage with a tank of water, and the rhino had his cage. I used to rub the rhino's cheeks also, but externally only. He didn't have a huge jaw. And you'd scratch around his horn and things like that that he couldn't do for himself, the way you scratch a dog where he can't reach. And he liked that. If he'd wanted to crush my arms against the bars once they were inside the cage, he could have simply swung his head and crushed my arm, but he didn't because he knew us also and we fed him and he liked being scratched so he was careful not to hurt us.

There were four leopards who lived in one cage because it was a mother named Sweetheart and her three offspring who were full-grown by now but because they were a family, the four of them were able to live in the same cage without fighting or quarreling. They had been raised by the beautiful aerialist who was married to Doctor Henderson, the circus



*The leopard den was one of a number of ammo cages, as they were called. While they lacked the aesthetic appeal of their predecessors, they were more efficient to handle than the wagons they replaced. Location unknown, 1951. Dyer Reynolds photo, Dom Yodice Collection.*



veterinarian. She used to visit them every so often and make sure we were taking care of them well. She also had black hair that hung down her back and she was probably more beautiful than the Cuban snake charmer. So we paid attention to what she wanted as far as taking very good care of those four leopards. But of course, I would have anyway because I loved animals. I used put my arms in the cage through the bars—they were wide enough that the cats could swipe their paws through the bars and hurt somebody if they wanted to. I used put my arms in with those four leopards and they were playing with my arms without stripping all the flesh off as they could have if they had chosen to with their claws or chewed my arms off with their jaw.

They didn't always feel like playing. Sometimes they just wanted to be stroked and scratched like a house cat. And they would purr with an enormous thrum that was thrilling, and their coats were thrilling to handle. And, as I said, their purr was thrilling. It was thrilling just to look at their eyes and faces. But if they wanted to play they would grab my hands and pull my arms all the way into the bars and they would clutch my hands into their mouths with their fangs, so-called—with their canines, I suppose—sufficiently tight so that I could not withdraw my arms even if I wanted to. If I tried to pull out they would just tighten their fangs on my hands so that I knew I was not going to get my arms back until they were ready to let go. But I expected that because this was not a one-time experience; this was something I did every day.

I was in the process of developing a lifetime affinity and intuition with wildlife which has carried me through nine trips to Alaska, five trips to Africa, two trips to India and so on and so on. And I've heard tigers roar at me at ground level in India in the wilds, and I've slept on the ground in the veldt in Africa and heard lions tomtomming back and forth at night without worrying because of my intimacy with their species in the circus.

Q: Ted, have you ever been attacked by any of those animals.

Hoagland: No, no. But the reason that they would hold my arms inside the cage was to practice disemboweling a gazelle. When in nature programs on television you see a leopard or a lion attack gazelle, you see them grab the gazelle by the throat and throw themselves underneath and disembowel their prey from underneath. So that's what they would do with my arm. They would lie under my arm, holding my hand as they would a gazelle in the wilds and bicycle with all four paws against the bottom of my arm but keep the claws in. So they were practicing disemboweling my arms without disemboweling my arm because they kept their claws in. Then we had two female tigers and one huge male tiger which I didn't fool with because the male tiger weighed 800 pounds—he was gigantic. And he pretended to be so tame; he was so beautiful. He was the most beautiful tiger you've ever seen. He would lie next to the bars and when new kids were hired to do this job. . . . [Here Hoagland seemed to forget the huge tiger, his thoughts drawn in another, related direction.]

There was a tremendous turnover in those days. Most working hands were either alcoholics or had been, and they would fall off the wagon and start drinking, and they would miss the train. They would never catch up again, or they would manage to climb onto the train, jump onto a flatcar. But when they were halfway between towns they would fall off the flatcar somewhere and break a shoulder or fill their face with gravel or something, and they would never reappear. So we were constantly hiring new people. And not just our department—the menagerie—but also all other departments were constantly hiring new people.

Q: How many people did you have at full strength in the menagerie?

Hoagland: Only a few; there was probably five or six. The giraffe man, who was the one who took care of the giraffe, was sleeping with the fat lady and so he didn't travel with us anymore. Somehow he'd started flirting with her as she sat—you know, she was a 400-pound woman—on her stage. He got talking and eventually they struck up a number, and she began buying him clothes, you know, khaki pants with new shirts. And also he got to travel on the second train along with the so-called freaks, the sideshow attractions. I'm sure the fat lady had her own compartment. So he no longer traveled with us on the first train. And he wore new clothes, and he got to eat with them, a little better food. And so he stuck with her. Sometimes she complained that it wasn't his fault but, as she explained it, "you're only in the creases." He could not extend far enough through her rolls of fat to enter into her actual body. But anyway she liked the company and she was always spending on him. He was respectful to her and, as I said, he benefited from their temporary alliance as long as the show was on the road. I'm sure he dropped her as soon as the show reached winter quarters.

Q: You remember there was a stake line of elephants. Were they behind. . . .

Hoagland: Elephants. Oh yeah. Sure. Well the 24 elephants, which was a hell of a lot of elephants, were not in our area. No, but they weren't a long way away. I was allergic to hay, so I didn't spend a lot of time with them. But the other cage hands didn't either because it wasn't their job to, and the elephant men resented anyone else messing with their elephants. The elephant men were all big, strong, strapping men who could whack an elephant with the elephant hook, which was a club with a hook on the end of it that they used to whack them as if it was a baseball bat if they wanted to discipline them when angry. So they were not men you quarreled with.



*The ammo cages had hinged side panels that opened at the front and back, and top and bottom, framing the occupants in a colorful jungle motif. This tiger cage's front and back flaps, picturing palm trees, were unfurled when this photograph was taken, as was the bottom panel, which displayed the lower half of the jungle themed art. The top flap remained unopened, perhaps to shade the cats. Location unknown, 1951. Dyer Reynolds photo, Dom Yodice Collection.*



I started telling you about that male tiger who every year managed to pull the arm off of a young cage hand because he would seem to be so tame and passive and invited you—seemed to invite you—to scratch his beautiful, beautiful, beautiful coat. Some kid who had just been hired would start by stroking his ribs, and he would just lie perfectly still, not doing anything, not roar or resist. But eventually the young guy would be scratching his shoulder and suddenly, when the hand reached close enough, suddenly the tiger would grab his hand and just tear his arm off. And the circus would send him to a local hospital to have the stump sewn up. And he might be able to stay overnight at the hospital. The brutality was almost unspeakable. But after, say, a day in the hospital with this new stump sewn up they'd take him over to catch a Greyhound for West Virginia or wherever he had come from, you know, some hick town. And that was the end of it. There was no insurance payment or say, "Gee, if you'll tell us the bank account, we'll be sure to. . . . There'll be payments arriving." They'd give him a free bus ticket home. And oh, the agony. I was there one time just the day after this had happened. I saw it first hand. The guy was in agony. I was in the cook tent at the same time he was eating the day after his arm had been torn off. He had this new bandage on his stump. And any time someone sat down on the bench, just a little jar on the bench caused him agony. And the next thing they put him on a bus. The agony of that trip home is unspeakable to think of. And after he got home . . . let's say he's still alive, no one in his hometown has ever believed his story: "Oh, I got my arm torn off by a tiger." I mean, no one would believe that. So he hasn't even had the advantage all these years of being believed.



*The rhino and hippo cages were occasionally spotted on the midway. This photo of the rhino den was taken in Philadelphia during the August 26 to August 31, 1952 engagement. Robert Good photo, Circus World Museum Collection.*

There were two female tigers who they kept in separate cages because they would have perhaps quarreled, although they got along in adjoining cages. And when they came into heat, I used to masturbate them. I was taught how by my mentor there. They would come to the bars and turn around and present themselves at the bars to be rubbed. And they would try to kill us in between . . . the way a female in the wild will attack a male tiger in between mating sessions to make sure he is worthy of her, so to speak, that his genes were going to have enough vitality and strength to be



*Showgirls atop the elephants, waiting to go into spec. Elephant boss Arky Scott on right with red costume. Sverre O. Braathen*

*photo used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.*



worthy of her. So they would, after being rubbed just so, they would go to the end of the cage and come back and then they would reach their paw out and roar and swipe it down. I would stand as close as I could to that enormous—these are full young tigers—that enormous paw without being reached. I would stand so close that the wind from that swipe would make the hair bounce on my head. And she would roar into my face as loud as she could, and it would just make the tears spring to my eyes, that roar. And after doing that, she would turn around and present herself to me again. It was like a ballet.

I was starting to say that the elephant men would have resented it if one of the cage hands had started messing with their elephants. And by the same token, if an elephant man had come over and said, "Hey, I want to scratch the hippo," I would say, "Hey, this is my animal. Take care of your elephants." I mean, "I'm the one who gets to scratch the inside of the hippo's mouth." But I did like to stand next to everybody's favorite elephant, who was named Ruth.

Ruth liked people and was affectionate. I wouldn't do it when the elephant men were around or observing, but I would stand next to her because sometimes she was staked—her feet were staked close to one of my cages. So I would stroke her and sometimes I would lie down close to her feet. If she wanted to crush me she could have, but of course she didn't want to. Modoc was another elephant I remember who was used a lot by the elephant men pulling up the quarter poles when the tent was raised or pulling them down during teardown.

Q: Who was the head elephant man?

Hoagland: Arky Scott. He was named Arky of course because he was from Arkansas. He had a huge whip. I think it was 24 feet long. He would stand before the 24—well, I'm sure there were 24 elephants there, but it's not important. And he would yell orders to his men. With 24 elephants, there would have been probably eight elephant men, say like one for every three. He would yell orders in the morning when they were first unloaded from the train. They rode the elephants on that route from the railroad yards to the lot.

After they got settled down, the elephants had their feet staked in a semicircle. They would be fed; there'd be hay for them to eat. And Arky would stand there and give his orders, and it wasn't just to the men but to the elephants also. And he had his huge whip which if he had to—I mean he wasn't a sadist; I didn't mean that—but if he



*Painted red in 1951, ammo cages are shown here with all four front flaps closed. Howard Tibbals Collection, The Ringling Museum.*

wasn't supposed to turn or if the elephant was not paying attention to what it was supposed to be doing during the performance or whatever.

Q: Tell me again how you happened to join the show and where, and your first impressions of the show?

Hoagland: Yeah, sure. So I got this letter from winter quarters in Sarasota in my dormitory at Harvard in the spring, let's say in April. And it said, "Join when you can." And as soon as June came and I had taken my exams. We're speaking of 1951 now. So I went home to New Canaan, Connecticut, after my freshman year. And I spent as much time with my parents as I had to to maintain friendly relations. But I was so eager to get to the circus. And this circus was playing in Plainville, Connecticut [on June 16, 1951], which was a town very close to Hartford. They were not playing in Hartford because of the most famous fire certainly in this country there's ever been. And a lot of people were killed. That had happened some years before.

Q: 1944.

Hoagland: Yeah, but this was '51, so seven years had passed, and the circus felt they could go back to the area of Hartford without

untoward reactions, that things had settled down. And they had to pay a lot of money in lawsuits, etc., of course, but that was over; the legal reactions, I think, were over, and the anger had settled down. But they didn't play in Hartford; they played in this small town outside. So I hitchhiked there, and the people who picked me up on the road between New Canaan and Plainville thought it romantic that

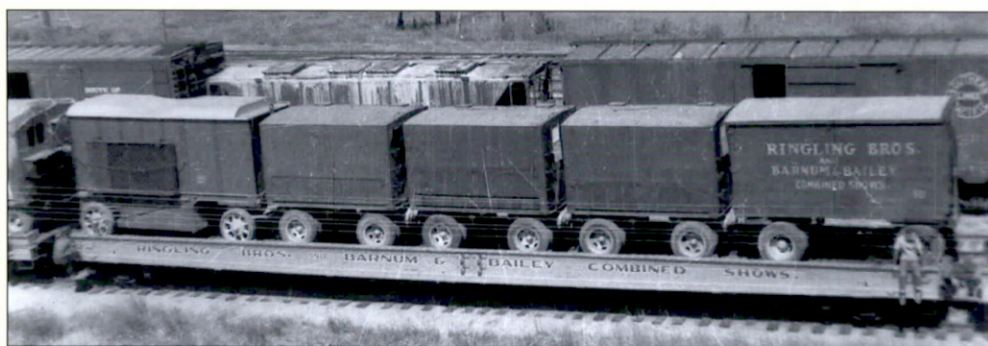


*Ringling-Barnum carried 90 head of ring stock, some of which are waiting to go into the tent in this image. Chicago, lakefront lot, south of Soldier Field, July 22, 1951. Sverre O. Braathen photo used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.*

I was running away, although I wasn't really running away to join the circus.

In a sense I was running away because I came from this affluent background which I didn't want to come from. And from a very controlling father. I was a socialist in my beliefs, and I hated the anti-Semitism and the anti-black background I had come from. My father died in the sixties. When he was dying he called me in and





*Flat car with giraffe cage in back, three cages built from ammunition carriers, and the #10 menagerie office wagon in front after arriving into Joplin, Missouri, September 15, 1952. Jim McRoberts photo, Pfening Archives.*

asked me if I inherited the house if I would pledge to him that I would never, never sell it to a Jew. And of course, I said, "No. I can't pledge you that." And so I was disinherited. Another example: He was an opera fan but he stopped going to the Metropolitan Opera when they allowed Marian Anderson to sing there. So to some degree I was running away. And after he realized how much I loved the circus, he was alarmed that I might turn into a circus bum, so to speak. Also, he'd told me he would stop paying my college tuition if I didn't stop joining the circus during the summer. Fortunately by that time I had gotten enough material to write my book, so I just smiled at him and said, "OK." He didn't want me to be a writer and tried unsuccessfully to halt Houghton from publishing my book. So to some extent I guess I was running away to join the circus.

After I got to Plainville I found my way to the lot was and I had this letter in my hand. It was just a very brief note: "Yes, we will hire you in the Animal Department. Join when you can." The animal department? I didn't know what that meant. Now, I'd worked in an animal hospital taking care of dogs and cats so I thought that must mean someone green like me would be taking care of horses.

Q: Had you ever been to a circus before?

Hoagland: Oh sure. And I do have to give my father credit because he used to take me to the circus in Madison Square Garden. But that didn't mean he wanted me to grow up that way. So I looked for the horses on this circus lot. It was in the morning so the show wasn't about to start. It was not hard to find those 90 horses. And the people who took care of horses looked like cowboys, and they were often cowboys. They had cowboy boots and cowboy hats and they were small like jockeys, because they jumped on and off horses, and so they were—unlike the elephant men, who were big, tall bruisers who could handle an elephant—the horsemen were ring stock men. The horses were called ring stock, as you probably know. They were smaller because one does not—a jockey can handle a derby [horse], a big thoroughbred and the jockey is half as big. I mean all you have to do is squeeze its mouth so it can't breathe and then it does what you say. It's a whole different animal for an elephant. If you squeeze an elephant's trunk, it will kill you with its trunk. So it's not the same as a horse. So I walked up to one of these small men with a big hat and I stuttered very, very badly at this time. Not just on this occasion, but always. In fact, I satisfied my language requirement in college by studying Latin because unlike French or Spanish you didn't have to speak Latin to pass the course. And I did stutter a little to him trying to talk. He perceived that I couldn't talk but he looked at my letter and said, "This isn't the animal department. This is ring stock. RING STOCK." And of course I didn't know the term ring stock meant horses, because they

were stock that ran around the ring. "This is ring stock." And that's all he said. And he just kind of turned his back on me.

Well, alright. Maybe they're going to let me take care of elephants. My God. I mean, I've taken care of dogs and cats, but if it's not horses, then. . . . So the elephants were not hard to find, as I said, 24 elephants. And I walked up to one of these elephant men and I showed him the letter. He perceived that I couldn't speak. But to have a handicap in the circus was not. . . . that's one of the things I loved about the circus personally. It was not like having a handicap in the outside world because

almost everyone there was handicapped in some way. I mean, they'd just been chased out by their wives, or they had secret epilepsy that they hadn't told anybody about yet, but it would suddenly happen and they lose their job and the next three weeks they'd have an epileptic fit. Or they'd just gotten out of jail and as they left town the circus happened to be there and they would go almost directly from the county jail to the circus because their family didn't want them home. So to have a handicap there was not at all extraordinary. It was hardly a handicap as long as you could do the work. Of course, if you couldn't do the work you wouldn't be hired.

This elephant fellow looked at my letter. He said, "This isn't the animal department, it's the elephants. What's wrong with you?" But then he took sufficient pity on me to understand that I didn't know what the animal department meant. The menagerie is what it meant. So he said, "Look for Number 10 wagon." There were approximately a hundred wagons. Our giraffe wagon, if I remember right, the giraffe wagon—one wagon with two giraffes probably—I think was 87 if I'm right. I used to sleep in it sometimes.

Q: Edith and Boston [were the giraffes' names].

Hoagland: Yeah, 87, which shows how many other wagons there were, and it wasn't the highest number by any means. But anyway he didn't tell me where to go. He just said, "Look for the Number 10 wagon." So I wandered around and looked at all the numbers and I finally found it. It was one of the smallest wagons, because there were no animals in it; it just carried supplies for the menagerie people, like the crumb boxes so-called where our little trunks that our belongings were in. Of course I had a crumb box. So I saw this Number 10 on a small wagon, and I walked toward it.

Four or five men were standing around, and there was a horse lying on the ground—a dead horse. I walked up to the person who seemed the most in command, who I don't think turned out to be the boss. . . . but it doesn't matter. Anyway I couldn't speak. I showed him the letter. He studied it. Now he had to hire somebody who couldn't speak. He showed it to others, then said, "Well, I guess we got to hire him, you know." So they handed me an axe and he pointed at the horse. And I realized, well. . . . I mean I had joined the circus to take care of mega fauna. I just never dreamed of this kind of a job. Of course I knew that a circus has lions and tigers in it and that they eat meat. And the circus doesn't go to the butcher shop. So I quickly realized that they were saying, "Chop up this horse." If it had been a live horse and they had handed me a pistol, I wouldn't have done it. I would have gone on home. But the horse had already been shot, so I wasn't harming the horse. So I did attempt to chop it up. I was not able to because I didn't know where to aim the axe. I mean I know that first you chop off the legs. I just didn't know



the right place. But I proved to them, first of all, that I would do what I was told if they hired me and that I was able-bodied, capable of chopping wood or whatever. I had sneakers on, and they were slipping in the blood. And I realized that they didn't really expect me to chop up the horse, and they didn't want me to get hurt because I was slipping in the blood, so they took the axe away and said, "Ok."

They put me under the charge of a man called Bible. He was called Bible because he had been born again while he was in prison. He was to watch out for me as a newcomer. I was fond of him, and he was nice to me and we got along well. He was responsible for taking care of the monkeys. We had green monkeys, and the name of the second species slips my mind at the moment. I think we had three different kinds of monkeys. And he had an orangutan, a baby orangutan. I helped with that. I helped with the giraffes and I helped with the hippo and with the gnu—with the wildebeests.

Q: And the rhino?

Hoagland: And the rhino. Sometimes we had a tapir. And we had different animals besides the big cats. I was not allowed to work with them until I had been broken in. And we only spent one day in Plainville, so we loaded that evening and I slept in my bunk. And I slept with a man who was so fat or large, husky, that I had to sleep with my arms over my shoulders because there wasn't space for them beside my body unless I lay over on my side. But he was ok to me. In fact, everybody was nice to me. Our next stop was Albany—Albany, New York—from Plainville, Connecticut. And so we stayed there about three days [according to the Ringling Barnum 1951 route book, the show had a Sunday layover on June 17 and two shows on June 18]. I got my Social Security card there for the first time. I had to have that to be hired. And I slept along with Bible in

*Huge crowd on Ringling-Barnum midway. Location unknown, 1951. Robert Sabia Collection, The Ringling Museum.*



*Menagerie worker cleans out a tiger cage using a long iron rod. Picture offers good view of back side of ammo cages. Location unknown, 1951. Dom Yodice Collection.*

the orangutan's cage because if we stayed overnight in these towns, we had to be wary of being mugged or rolled, or whatever they wanted to call it, by local toughs who were even tougher than the circus people. They weren't tougher than the elephant men. They wouldn't rob them. But they would be looking for someone just sleeping on the ground who didn't have any protection. So all the circus people who stayed on the lot at night, as opposed to going back to the train and sleeping on the train where you were safe, had to be extra careful. The performers of course went back to their





compartments on the train. And those of us work hands who wanted to sleep on the train would be allowed to, but most of us preferred to be out in the open air in the new town. But we slept in the orangutan's cage—that is, Bible and me. There was a third person the first several nights, not just in Albany but other towns. Robbers couldn't get at you if you were inside a cage. There was a box inside the cage where we put the baby orangutan at night so it wouldn't be picking our pockets and pulling our hair all night long. It wasn't cruel to the orangutan; it slept in the box anyway. So we would close the

box with the orangutan in it and sleep in the cage to avoid being robbed. After I started taking care of the big cats, then I always slept under the lions' cage in towns where we stayed overnight. I mean, big places like Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Chicago or Rochester. The lions would lie there with their paws stretched through the bars, to give them extra space for their paws. And so I would be under the lions with their paws hanging out around me. And if a mugger wanted to rob me, the guy—if he hadn't been torn apart by the lions—would have had a heart attack when he snuck up and they roared at him. I was totally safe with the lions over my head, and I loved to hear them roar; they used to. . . .

Q: How many lions were there?

Hoagland: I think there was just two; there was a male and a female in the same cages. They used to breed. When she was in heat, they would breed continually for four or five days a week. There was a lion act in a different area of the circus lot—the lions that performed in the ring, which our menagerie animals did not do. And my lions would call back and forth—they called thom-thom—with the lions that were in a lion act.

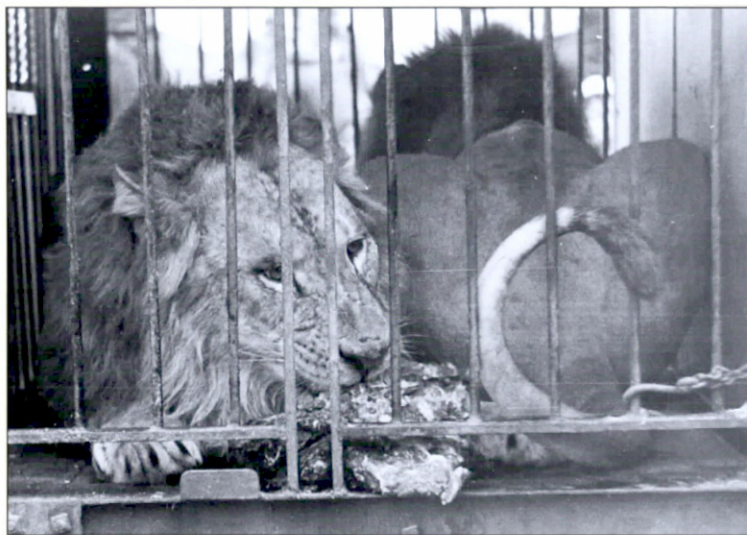
Q: Who was the trainer?

Hoagland: I just forgot his name.

Q: Was it Trevor?

Hoagland: Trevor Bale was a tiger trainer. To handle the lions they had a German who was a real disciplinarian. After doing his act at Madison Square Garden, for example, he would be so wound up that he would stand facing a blank wall in the basement and whip the wall until his energy had unwound. And he'd stand there and shout at the wall in German—his commands, you know—until finally he cooled off. Trevor Bale was the opposite at it. He was sweet with his tigers and he was sweet and gentle to people like me also.

I knew a number of animal trainers, like Pat Anthony at the World Jungle Compound in California, where the movie studios got the animals that performed in the movies. And Mabel Stark, the great female tiger trainer, spent her last years there. They had a little show. They had some bleachers around the cage, and she would play with a single tiger because she had a stroke and one of her arms she couldn't even lift at all and the other arm, as I remember, she could only lift halfway up. But she played with a tiger who could have torn her to pieces in a second if he wished to, but he didn't. He just



*Lion enjoys breakfast on Ringling-Barnum, location unknown, 1951. Circus World Museum Collection.*

circled her and rubbed against her. He was petted with the one hand that she had raised to stroke it.

I had written a letter to Mabel Stark, who said she would hire me if they had an opening. I got a ride to Los Angeles, then hitchhiked to Ventura County. I showed up unannounced at the World Jungle Compound and was greeted by Anthony. He immediately asked if I had money to eat on, which was none. So I was hired to help take care of the animals . . . a crew of four. I rented a room in a boarding house across the street and ate at a local diner. I

stayed at the compound for several weeks. Although I didn't know her very well, I liked Mabel Stark very much. And Pat Anthony was always very nice to me.

Q: Just to make sure, when did you head for California?

Hoagland: Right after my father told me he would stop paying my tuition if I worked in the circus anymore. That's when I went out to Thousand Oaks to work in the World Jungle Compound.

Q: How long was this? Were you just on Ringling that one year?

Hoagland: I was there in the summer of '52 as well, probably a total of five months, if you add the two summers. And I also joined them when they came to Madison Square Garden, which coincided with my spring vacation from college. I would join them for a few days. And they would come to Boston from New York, and that happened to coincide with the exam period, so I would join them on the days when I wasn't taking exams.

And there was one time when I hitchhiked home from the West Coast. In the summer of '53 I was at the World Jungle Compound. I also fought forest fires that summer and worked in the cannery in San Diego. But I was hitchhiking home from Oregon where I had relatives I visited in the summer. And when I got to Salt Lake City, I found that the Ringling circus was there, so I joined them [August 31]. And when I say joined them, I don't mean on the payroll, but just joined. And they went from Salt Lake City to Idaho [Ogden, September 1, and Idaho Falls, September 2]. And after they were through in Idaho and were starting on to Seattle or someplace, I had to get back East so I hitchhiked home. But the menagerie people let me join anytime I chose after that, in the sense that I wasn't on the payroll but they gave me a meal ticket and a place to sleep.

Q: Now, when you embarked on your journey in 1951—I mean, your parents were pretty affluent back then.

Hoagland: Yeah.

Q: So what were the cultural adjustments that you had to make?

Hoagland: I didn't find that at all hard to make. I found the circus invaluable in preparing me for life. It taught me that life is a constant process of slight risk; not major risk, a slight risk. And change, the constant potential within one's self of flexibility and self-reliance, of sizing up people and situations, of trusting everyone—almost everyone—a little but no one a lot, of optimism and joy, but the readiness to change course if you had misjudged a situation or if circumstances change beyond what you expected or



anyone's control. For example, I always have some cash in my belt, even though I know at this point in my life I may not have to use it in all my travels. But I'm always prepared for anything. I'm also always prepared to die. I believe that heaven is on earth, nowhere else. And the potential of heaven is on earth, if we chose to recognize it and allow it to be. But it's not just that one can die in the next hour or day but that there's no tragedy—obviously I'm speaking as an adult here—because it's a cycle of energy and that's a vial of energy and that's what God is, where heaven is. And one's energy is transferred into bugs and birds and the things that use energy.

For example, while I was at the World Jungle Compound there was a mountain lion, a female mountain lion. Of course I trusted her more than the tigers because she was different. And so I just climbed into her cage when no one was watching. It's not that anyone was there to rescue me. They wouldn't have allowed me to do it. I touched her fur through the bars for a while and I knew she liked me. So I climbed in and she was astonished actually. I don't know if anyone had ever climbed into her cage. She had been taken out of the cage when she appeared in movies, but there had always been a chain on her. But I climbed into the cage impulsively and she turned around and went to the back of the cage. I mean



One of the Ringling-Barnum seat wagons, new in 1948, being loaded out in Columbus, Ohio on August 3, 1952. Show uses almost this exact location today. Sverre O. Braathen photo used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.

kept her claws in so it was just like a lady's muff, fluffed into my face . . . a soft lady's muff, with no claws.

So as I say, I've often been justified in the trust I've placed. I've never broken a bone in my whole life. I've never been mugged. I lived in New York in the meat packing district before it was

special. It was crawling with drug dealers and so on for 30 years. And I never was mugged because I had a sixth sense. I had intuition. When I was in danger, just as with animals, I would feel it and I would cross the street. If someone was coming up behind to mug me I would know it and I would get the hell out of his way or turn around and face him. He was expecting to get me from behind by surprise and I would swing around—I was not frail—and he'd veer off and look for someone else unsuspecting to hit from behind.

Q: But that first year that you were with Ringling you were not a wino from the Sally. They knew you were a college kid. How did they accept you?

Hoagland: They accepted me because I never mentioned it. And it's not like it was a secret. It wasn't a secret. Fortunately there was another college kid, from Cornell, who to some extent had broken the ice for me. He was there first and they

had gotten used to him. So a second college kid came along who, well, in my case, couldn't even speak. So if someone wanted to make fun of me they didn't need to be intimidated by someone who was going to be a lawyer or who could be a smartass. I couldn't say, "Oh, you've never been to Paris?" I had never been to Paris either. Or, "Oh, don't you know. . .?" It was a fact that I was an Easterner. But I certainly didn't indicate that I came from an affluent family. That's the last thing I wanted.



African-American canvas men unbailing a big top middle section on Ringling-Barnum. Location unknown, 1951. Howard Tibbals Collection, The Ringling Museum.

I was on all fours; I couldn't stand up. And there was no point in standing up; that wouldn't have saved me if she wanted to hurt me. But anyway, I was on all fours. She went to the back of the cage, she turned around, and as I said, she was a full-grown mountain lion and her paw was the size of my face. And she launched to charge me, launched herself at me. She fluffed out her paw to my face. It was as wide as my face. And just as the leopards had done who were practicing disemboweling a gazelle using my arm as a gazelle, she



These people were not aspiring relative to college, and they weren't saying, "Oh, I could go to Harvard if I just had the money." It's not something they wanted. They didn't picture me as somebody special, even if I had been able to speak, like this Cornell guy. I lost track of him but he read something of mine in *Yankee* magazine like 40 years later and he wrote to me and said he was an accountant now in New Jersey. His life didn't end up . . . my classmates' lives



*Children climbing on cages trying to get a look at the exotic animals in a scene unimaginable today. Los Angeles, September 10, 1951. Circus World Museum Collection.*

haven't ended up being particularly enviable for the most part.

Q: Tell me about the caste system.

Hoagland: Oh, yeah. Sure, well, the lowest caste, of course, was the African-Americans. The only job they were allowed to have . . . anyone recognized as African-American was only allowed the single job of helping put up or tear down the big top. That was all they were allowed to do, period! They were not allowed to take care of any animals or to work on props, seat wagons. No, they weren't allowed to be so-called seat men, prop men, cage hands. They weren't allowed to work on the train crew. They weren't allowed to do anything but put up and tear down the big top. They were paid \$12 a week. And they were absolutely socially separate from all the white people. There was no conversation; they didn't know their names. There was no interplay between them and even us who were just out of jail or alcoholics or whatever. They were making less than \$2 a day.

And the police in the local towns always treated them differently also. If a white work hand was suspected of shoplifting or, say, being rude to local women or whatever, if the local police came on the circus lot, they treated all circus people as the lowest of the low. However, if they were white, they weren't clubbed on the head. A white person might be taken away for questioning. But if the police came looking for a black man . . . I'm talking about in the North now because I worked on the circus jump from Connecticut to Omaha. I mean Council Bluffs was my last stop [August 2, 1951] because we had to cross the river from Omaha. I mean if they were shaking a black man, they were going to club the tar out of him as soon as they caught him.

After that lowest strata you had people of my level who slept two to a bunk and were paid \$14 a week, exactly \$2 a day, and did not stay long on average, six days or six weeks. It was very grueling. You

were up at 4:30 a.m. and you got back to the train after the evening show started. So let's say you got back to the train at 8:00, 8:30, so you just had less than eight hours on the train. But lots of people once they got back to the train there would be a beer hall not far from the train, so they'd go to this beer hall and they spent two or three hours there. If they had any money, they would be drunk and sometimes they would end up on the flatcars instead of sleeping two to a bunk. And that was dangerous.

I slept on the flatcars, too, when there was a full moon at night. It was beautiful. But I wasn't drunk; I wasn't going to fall off. But if you were drunk on the flatcars you might start walking between the cars and fall and get run over. Or sliced in half, or God only knows. But it was utterly impossible, unheard of for us to speak to a performer. The only performer I ever spoke to was this beautiful aerialist who was married to the veterinarian, Doctor Henderson. And she spoke to me because I was taking care of her leopards, her beloved leopards. And I spoke to her. She could have been a queen in every sense socially, but also her beauty. But I could only speak if spoken to, and that was by her. The idea of walking up to a performer even of my own gender and striking up a conversation, I would have been fired.

Q: There were a lot of foreign people on the show, weren't there?

Hoagland: Yeah, they were called hulligans, as I recall. Wasn't that the term, hulligans? But it applied to them also under the caste system. And there was the difference of language. Anytime the circus lot was next to a river, or lake for that matter, but I just remember the rivers, like the Ohio River or the great rivers we played next to, we all swam. I'm talking about the young work hands. We swam naked. And these performers, the ballet girls and the female tumblers and aerialists and everything, they'd stand on the bridge or on the bank and watch us swimming naked, and



*Ringling-Barnum hippo being watered at an unknown location in 1952. Hoagland impressed girls by sticking his hand in the hippo's mouth. Dyer Reynolds photo, Dom Yodice Collection.*

laugh and stuff. But it was inconceivable, even if we put our clothes on, that we could go and talk to them. Now that was not true with sideshow people. The sideshow people were separate; there wasn't a real caste. They were certainly allowed to speak to performers, but the performers almost all looked down on them. Most of the



sideshow people were not physically able to move around. The giant suffered pain anytime he walked around. The fat lady was 400 pounds. And consider the armless-legless girl. So, they did not spend any time with performers. Now, the snake charmer could have, she wouldn't have been fired. But I don't think she ever did. Also, of course, she was a dark-skinned Cuban.

Q: Well, in the sense of when you work in a building there are physical barriers, like in college. But in the circus the barriers were there nonetheless, weren't they, even though you were in the open?

Hoagland: Oh, yeah. It was unthinkable to go to clown alley. You'd walk past because obviously you had occasion to walk past clown alley, but you wouldn't stop and try to make friends with Emmett Kelly. It would be like, "What the hell are you doing here?"

Q: Now that you have mentioned towners.

Hoagland: The generic name was Elmer because it sounds like a hick name. And if circus people were angry at them because they were nosing around, let's say clown alley or wherever, some place they shouldn't be, we called them lot lice. And I don't say I did, but that was the term, lot lice. They were like lice: "Get the hell off of me." I mean, "The cotton candy is over there. Go buy your cotton candy." or "No, I'm not going to talk to you kid. I'm not paid to talk to you, kid. Get the hell out of here. The animals are over there. Go see the animals."

Q: The fact that the menagerie was in the open. . . .

Hoagland: But the Number 10 wagon was not right with the animals. It was separate. Sure, you had certain hours that you had to stand close to your animals, partly to protect the animals from the people, so that your kids wouldn't throw stones at the chimpanzee. Or stick their arm in and the chimpanzee would snap the arm like that if the wrong person did it.

Q: It was almost always the same with towners, wasn't it? Prowling around. And several times the kids would go under the

menagerie animals, and when they came out after the matinee. The evening, of course, we were gone. But in the matinee performances when they came out we would be on duty to make sure that the animals didn't hurt them, and vice versa. And of course that was an opportunity for kids like me to show off.

Q: But did you ever date a local?

Hoagland: No, because I couldn't speak. There was no rule about that, though. You didn't get fired. You didn't get fired if the circus spent like three or four or five days in Chicago, for example, and three or four days in Cleveland. After hours if you didn't want to sleep under the lions cage or go back to the train, if you had found a local girl and dated her there was no law against that. There was in one particular town, I think it happened several times, but there'd be girls mentally ill. And it was not in any sense healthy for them. But they would come out to the circus lot—individuals alone who would come out to the circus lot and lie in the grass at some distance, not close to any of the attractions or actions in the public, but often a corner of the lot. And anyone who wanted to could sleep with them for 25 cents. I remember a particular place where that girl spent the whole day lying in the grass and anyone could sleep with her. People wouldn't lose their jobs for doing that.

At the same time when I was showing off for a pretty girl by putting my arms in the leopards' cage, or my arm in the hippo's mouth and turning around, and she would say, "Wow!" Or whatever she'd say. I was unable to strike up a conversation because I couldn't speak. So after a while she'd move on. She'd think, "This guy's been showing off for me but he can't speak. So I'll go somewhere else."

Q: What was the circus like on the best day, and what was it like on the worst day?

Hoagland: Of course, the weather would determine the answer to that. It was simple. If it was a rainy day, a stormy, rainy day it was a mess. Fortunately my group did not have anything to do



*Giraffe wagon at Columbus, Ohio, August 3, 1952. Sverre O. Braathen photo used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.*

ropes and try to get next to the lions.

Hoagland: Oh yeah. Sure. You're constantly having to say, "You can't do that." Or they have Cracker Jacks and they want to feed Cracker Jacks to some animal that shouldn't eat Cracker Jacks. I'd say, "You can give it to me and I'll eat it, but you can't feed it to the whatever." No. We talked politely when we were on duty, I mean before the performances when the crowds were looking at the

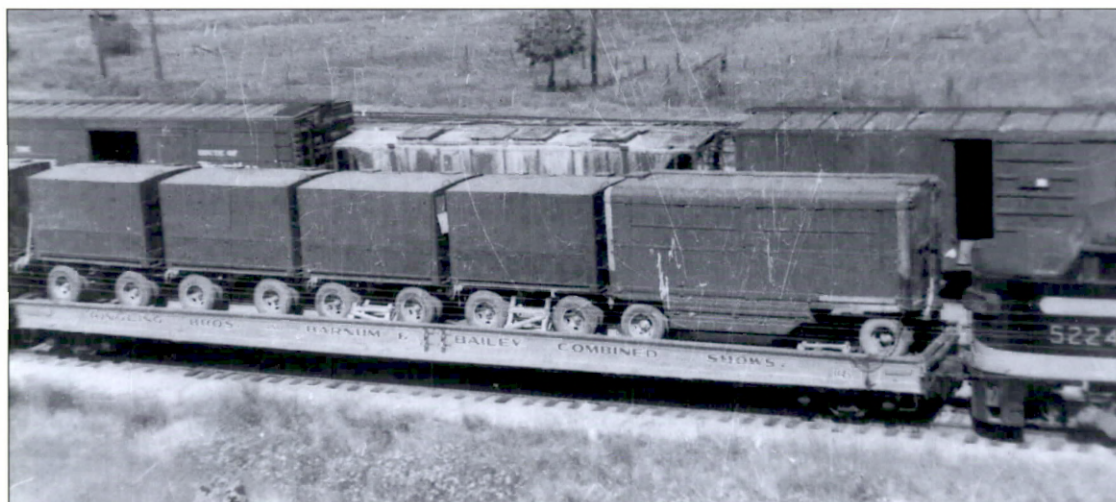


*Lions in transfer cage #94 being moved from ammo cage #76 to big top for Oscar Konyot act, location unknown, 1952. John Van Matre photo, Pfening Archives.*

with putting up the big top or tearing it down, which, as you can imagine, was just terrible when it got soaked and when it was on the ground, and all the rain that fell on it would make it so heavy that even the elephants could hardly move anything.

All we had to do was close up the animal cages, the flaps that opened up and fastened to the roof, the top flaps and the bottom flaps and the side flaps. When doing this, we'd have to scale down





Flat car carrying rhino den and four ammo cages at Joplin, Missouri, September 15, 1952. Jim McRoberts photo, Pfening Archives.

from the top of one cage wagon and then climb to the top of the next one. In order to save time, I was the most agile in the menagerie, I would jump between the cage wagons. You just didn't stand in one place and hop over. Even on dry days you had to take a running start. On rainy days, when the tops were soaking wet, I would land on the next wagon and skid almost to the other end.

Q: How far a distance was that between those cage wagons?

Hoagland: Now I'm not, I'm trying not to exaggerate. It was as far as I could safely jump. Let's say seven feet. I wasn't drinking and I never fell. It was a long way down to the ground and if you fell between the wagons or you hit the wagon pole . . . God forbid what might happen if you hit the wagon pole.

My agility came in handy, too, when I rode on the back of the Caterpillar tractor spotting the wagons in the right place. I enjoyed it, jumping on and off the back of the tractor. I liked to breathe. I liked the importance.

As for the worst days, I didn't have any bad experiences. I sometimes had bad dreams. I would dream we were sleeping on the giraffes' wagon sometimes for protection if we stayed overnight because once we closed the door we were safe inside there. And the giraffes were enclosed in two compartments, very tall compartments. They couldn't step on us because we were in that small area between the compartments and the door. But occasionally I would have a nightmare where they had gotten out of the compartment and their huge feet—it was not that they wanted to hurt us—their huge feet were coming down on me. Or once or twice I dreamed I was sleepwalking—and I never knew whether this was true or not. I may have actually been sleepwalking—but I sleepwalked over to the tent where the elephant men slept and I was in the middle of the tent . . . it wasn't a tent; it was a top . . . but anyway they were all asleep all around me and I had to get out of there without waking them so I just kept walking over them without waking anybody or they'd beat hell out of me because they would assume I was somebody in there to rob them. That's what they would assume.

With the book, *Cat Man*, finally published I got my picture in *Time* magazine, and it was also reviewed in *Newsweek*. They didn't use the picture of me in *Newsweek*. They used a picture of the circus. By that time I was a private in the army stationed at Valley Forge Army Hospital in Pennsylvania. I was a lab tech. I had no idea what was happening—this was when it came out in January of 1956—and

one day some officer came toward me and said, "Aren't you Private Hoagland?" And I said, "Yessir!" And he said, "Did you know your picture is in *Time* magazine this week?" "No sir!" Which I didn't. And then the next week I was also walking on the Army post and some officer—a different officer—said, "Are you Private Hoagland?" "Yessir, yessir!" "Did you know your book was reviewed in *Newsweek* this week?" "No sir!"

And I hadn't even yet lost my virginity. Fortunately there was the older sister of one of my buddies whose family

happened to live in that area of Pennsylvania. She was a playground director and about four years older than I and she just took me home and relieved me of my virginity, very kindly. When you can't speak, it's pretty hard to get very close to girls your own age. It has to be somebody who doesn't mind if you can't speak. But that was after the book came out.

Q: It seems to me the language you used in *Cat Man* was very gritty for the time. Tell me about that. Did you have any problems with the publisher saying, "Ah, I think you're going a little too strong here?"

Hoagland: Well, as I mentioned earlier, obviously when I sold my book to a publisher, it was a big deal to me. And I was so proud I showed the proofs to my father. That turned out to be a big mistake because when he read the thing he immediately wrote to Houghton Mifflin's lawyer, who he knew, asking that the book be held up and not be published, precisely because of what you described as its grittiness. At that time I was still trying to be a great novelist. I was out on the Mississippi. I was about to be drafted. I volunteered. The book was finished. I sold the book before I graduated from college but it was not finished. I had to spend another year—I lived on Beacon Hill on \$6 per week at the top of Beacon Hill; this was in 1954-'55—finishing the book. And when I finished it I told my draft board I was ready to be drafted and they said, "Ok."

In the meantime I went out to St. Louis. It was not the smartest idea in the world, but I wanted a great novel and I was going to find it on the Mississippi. I was staying at a hotel there and I guess my parents must have known how to reach me because I got this call from Houghton Mifflin saying, "Would you fly back to Boston? We'll pay airfare, but we have to talk with you before we publish this book." This came as a great shock. I was counting on its coming out. So I flew back to Boston, and I was ushered into the office of the editor-in-chief, Paul Brooks, and also Charlie Prentice, this lawyer I didn't know. I knew Paul Brooks from before because he had bought my book and obviously had read it along the way. They said, "On page so-and-so . . ." First of all they asked me if I was happy with the number of times that words such as "piss" were used in the book. I said, "Yes. It's important because I'm describing a life in which these words were used as language, and it's a reality. And so I am." Then one of them said—I guess it was Brooks because the lawyer said there was nothing illegal about the word "piss" as opposed to other words—"And are you sure you don't want to take





Flat with giraffe den, three animal cages and the menagerie office wagon being unloaded in 1951, location unknown. Pfening Archives.

out some of those words?" And I said, "No, I don't want to." And he said, "Ok. That's fine. I'm not going to insist on that." But then he said on a certain page there is a picture of a circus worker in a suggestive posture in front of a woman. They said, "Why is he crouching in front of that woman there?" I had no idea. Finally they looked at each other for a little while, and smiled and one of them said, "He doesn't know what we were talking about. We're trying to put something in his mind that is not there. He doesn't know." Which was true. Finally they said, "Fine. We'll publish the book. And you can go back to St. Louis."

I actually went to Manhattan and discovered by reading the [New York] *Daily News* that there was a wonderful gym called Stillman's Gym on Eighth Avenue where fighters trained for their fights at Madison Square Garden. I began hanging out there, and that became my second novel.

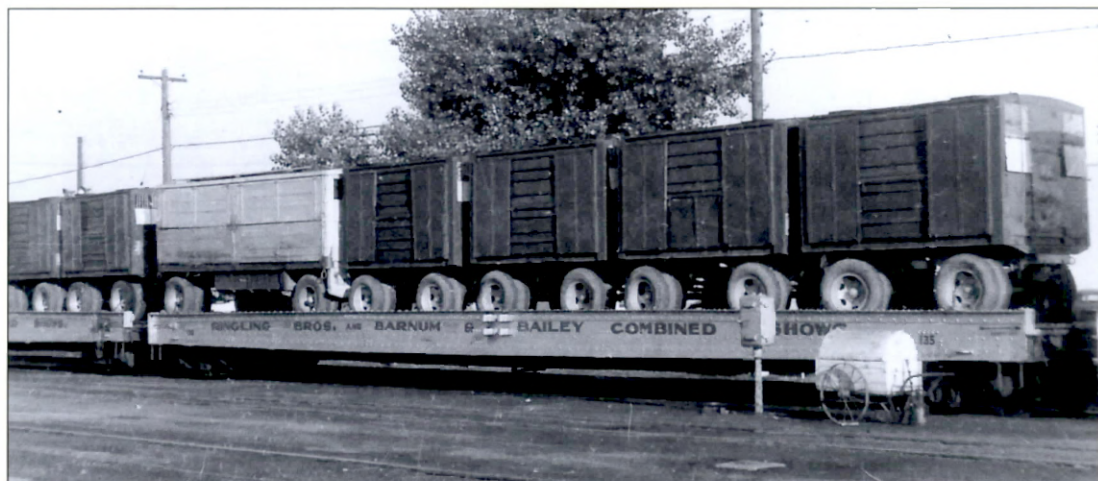
I worked so hard partly because I couldn't talk. In the evening after classes I had friends. I didn't eat supper alone in my dorm; they called it the dining room. But afterward I had no dates so I would go back to the library and work like a dog, a happy dog. I loved writing. I have always loved writing. So that was one reason why I was so precocious and sold my first book before I even graduated because my only entertainment or relaxation was walking. I walked all over Boston, all over the place. And otherwise I wrote.

Q: This sort of predated the Harold Robbins books, popular novels jammed with crude words and action.

Hoagland: I don't know what you're talking about. I know Robbins was a best-seller, but I don't know what book you're talking about. It's like asking an elephant if he's heard of an ant, you know. I don't know what you're talking about. . . .

Q: This *Cat Man* language was in your face. Did critics ever say anything about this?

Hoagland: No. The *Time* magazine issued in the middle of January 1956 said something like "Hoagland's descriptions of the circus would top anything of the kind in fiction." Now you can't beat that. But they began the review by saying it's like people who go to the circus picking up a rug and finding out what really is underneath it. It warns potential readers that if they don't want to be disillusioned about the circus, they shouldn't read this book. But if



Hippo den and four ammo cages on a flat, location unknown, 1951. Dom Yodice Collection.



they are prepared for what's under the rug they will find descriptions—what they were really talking about was the big cats. But when we used it on our book jackets we put “dot, dot, dot descriptions dot, dot, dot that top anything of the kind in fiction” as opposed to “descriptions of the big cats in the cat department.”

Q: One of the things I admired about *Cat Man* is that you wrote only about areas of the circus that you knew about, that you witnessed. You didn't go into backyard gossip of what was happening to the performers. You didn't know them.

Hoagland: No, I didn't watch the performances as a rule. Obviously I watched once. But our job was to keep people from sneaking in, lifting the sidewall and sneaking in. We were not there to watch the performance. We were there to make sure no idiot stuck his arm in the lion cage or some poor father who didn't have any money, but his kids wanted to see the circus, didn't lift the sidewall and let them in. There were a few times, if we actually talked to the father and saw it was real, we would say, “Ok, go ahead.” I mean it did happen sometimes if we knew that the father was just not stingy, that he actually had no money and this was his one chance to take his kids to the circus.

Q: Your main character in the book. . .

Hoagland: Fiddler, yeah.

Q: Tell me, is Fiddler an amalgamation of characters?

Hoagland: No, he's me. He's me. Now, I wasn't a destitute drifter, but what I'm trying to say is that everything that he does in the circus with the animals, I did. And his longing for the townie girls, or *townier* girls, more properly, corresponded to mine. And there was a young work hand, a drifter named Red, who was actually Red as described there. And the wise man who was my mentor in the circus and taught me how to handle the big cats and which ones to trust and how to rub the hot tigers and how to trust the leopards, but don't ever trust the jaguar or the Siberian tiger or the male Bengal tiger, his real name was Ralph Leaf. He was a Mohawk Indian from the top of New York State, that reservation adjoining Canada.

Q: Was that Chief?

Hoagland: Yeah, I'm talking about Chief now. He was a real man who first befriended the Cornell college boy who was taking care of the cats before me and after that befriended me. And he was from the same tribe of Mohawks, band of Mohawks, who did the high steel work on all the skyscrapers of that era. I shouldn't say all of them, but the riskiest stuff was done by a colony of Mohawks who lived in Brooklyn when they were working, but they were from the same reservation he was from. And he was doing something comparable with his cats who respected him and treated him differently from me. They really respected him. He would come to the cage and lift his fists and they would stand up. They weren't fearful. They were respectful and they would stand up, the way you would describe the elephants responding to a very good elephant man. But he got caught, was clawed in Madison Square Garden.



Billboard for Minneapolis engagement of July 27 and 28, 1951. Sverre O. Braathen photo used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.

Unfortunately I didn't know about it or I would have written about it at the time or I could have written about it in the *New Yorker* or *The New York Times*.

After I left he married a nurse in the hospital. He stayed in New York and worked in the riding stables alongside Central Park West, in the 80s where horses that you see riding around Central Park are stabled. He ended his life as a groom in those stables. If I had known about that—and I'm speaking of 20 years later or more—I couldn't have solved his problems but I could have written about this hero of mine who was now a groom in those stables. The Cornell guy who otherwise I didn't know at this time had been closer to him personally and he knew him after Chief was living in New York and working at the stables. And when Chief died, this Cornell guy, who had become an accountant in New Jersey, took his ashes—now I'm choking up about this—took his ashes to the George Washington Bridge in upper Manhattan and scattered them into the Hudson River because the Mohawk territory streams drain to the upper Hudson and so on.

Q: How many reprintings of *Cat Man*?

Hoagland: Four, in paperback. The original sold for \$3.75, which is what hardcovers sold for then.

Q: Why has it been reprinted so many times?

Hoagland: Well, I hope, I assume because it's unique. Isn't it unique?

Q: Absolutely.

Hoagland: So I assume that's why. Other than the fact that I worked—I mean, there's no analogy because if you say “he worked liked a dog” it's not true because dogs don't work that way. But I worked as hard as I could for three or four years on it at about 10 words per hour when you average all those eight drafts together. I would write approximately two pages per day. In pencil. And then I would do that seven more times, two pages per day. So if you work that hard on a book and the subject matter is as flamboyant as the circus and you were writing about what you love, which was what I was doing, the book ought to be reprinted. That's true as well with my first journal from British Columbia, *Notes From the Century*



*Before*, which has also been reprinted four times in paperback.

Q: With all of your travels and subjects you've covered you never returned to a book about the circus.

Hoagland: No, no. Because I'd said all I had to say. I think I have written a very definitive and long story about the carnival, which was published in the *Yale Review* around 2003. But it hasn't been in book form because I don't have a lot of stories to connect it with. I love carnivals, too, but there's a world of differences between circuses and carnivals. There doesn't seem to be ordinary folks among either of these traveling groups and they themselves have little in common. There are circus people and there are carnival people. They're not the same. It's not that carnival people look down on circus people. It's the other way around. Why? Because, you know, the carnival person doesn't travel much . . . doesn't travel every day. He travels every week or two and they spend all day handing darts to people to throw at balloons whereas the circus person is on a high wire or trapeze or is doing something.

Q: Speaking of people throwing stuff, you had a character in your book named Julius who was a concessionaire who threw stuff at people.

Hoagland: Yeah, he was patterned after a real person. I haven't read this book essentially for 50 years, but he was probably a caricature. He was patterned after a real person though.

Q: Most of the events that you wrote about happened?

Hoagland: Oh yeah.

Q: The people were real?

Hoagland: Oh yeah.

Q: In other words, you submerged yourself into Fiddler.

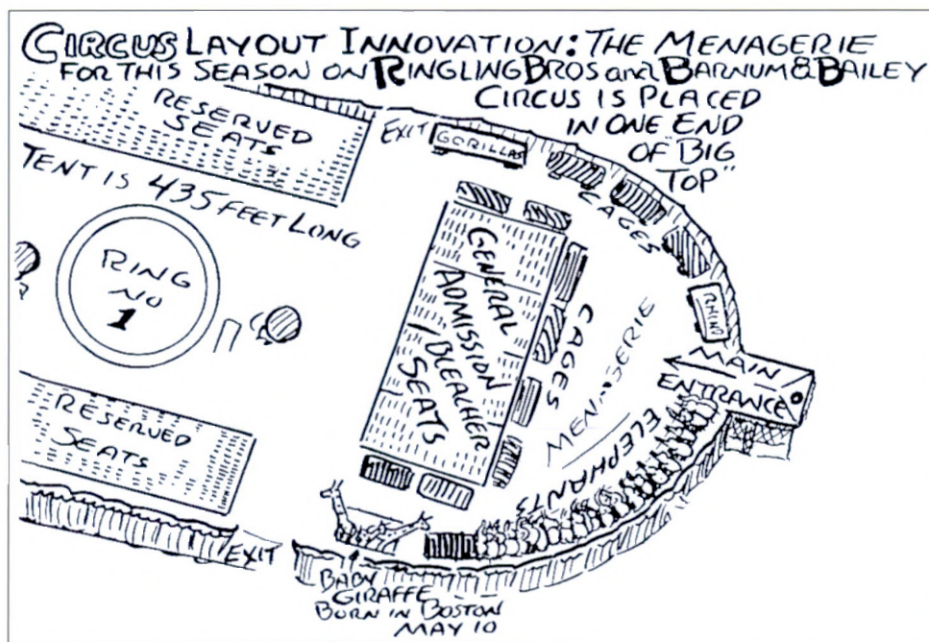
Hoagland: I suppose you could use the word "submerged." I used him as a vehicle for my own experiences. Now he was not an Ivy League student and he was not headed to write 21 more books and he did not come from an affluent background, and he hadn't had Pulitzer Prize-winning teachers [Archibald MacLeish and Henry Steele Commager] etc.

Q: And unlike you, Fiddler died.

Hoagland: Well, the only reason he's killed by the lion is because I was just a kid writer and I simply didn't know how to end the novel. One of the reasons I'm not primarily a novelist is that I had that trouble with all of my novels. I have a novel right now that I haven't finished because I don't know how it ends. But even in *Cat Man* I didn't just kill him [Fiddler]. I had him killed by a lion. I did that because I didn't know what else to do with him. I never believed that could have happened to me, and it never did happen to me. I was never harmed by the cats or even by cats that were not my own cats.

In India I was roared at by a very large male tiger on the footpath a couple of miles from the nearest road. It was at dawn and I was on a bird walk. I was with a young Indian man who was the translator. That's why he was there. But we were a long way from anyone on the track. And a colony of monkeys had been yelling over our heads because we were in their territory. And we were listening to all the birds. Then there was this roar, which I immediately remembered from the circus. This was not just a little tiger. This was a big male tiger. A very big one. And we looked at each other, and I remember

my foot was in the air, and I said, "That's not a monkey." And so we just swung our feet around and began walking the other way. If that tiger had wanted to kill us all he had to do was stay silent because we were walking on his path right toward where he was. If I had been alone it might have been more likely that he would have attacked. But, of course, I thought it was karma and I pretended in my mind that it was karma because I had been so sweet to the circus tigers that, of course, it would leap the oceans and all the tigers would know I was the good guy. That big fellow paralleled us for, oh, certainly a half mile, maybe a mile, continually roaring to "Get the hell out of my territory. You're lucky I didn't kill you." After we got back to the road a couple of miles away there was a road crew working. They had been asleep when we arrived, when we parked our cars to take this bird walk. It was before dawn and they were still asleep. But they were awake now. And they said, through the translator, "Oh, you shouldn't have gone there. That's where the tiger



Bird's eye view of Ringling-Barnum big top interior showing how menagerie was laid out at main entrance of tent at Washington, D. C., May 18, 1951. Drawing by Karl Kae Knecht in July-August 1951 *White Tops*. Used with permission.

lives."

Q: I take it from reading your book the biggest occupational hazard of working around tigers and lions was not the claws, but cleaning their cages.

Hoagland: Well, we cleaned the cages with these long iron rods that had a little bar at the end which you would use to scrape out the feces. As long as you were paying attention to where the animal was, you couldn't be hurt. If you simply foolishly pushed the bar in and then stood right next to the bars without pulling it out again and the lion or tiger came next to the bars, you were . . . but obviously one didn't do that if one was alert. The only time I ever saw cruelty to the cats was sometimes if cage hands got angry at a cat. Using this long iron rod it was possible to ram it directly into the lion again and again. The lion would retreat to the end of the cage. The lion would roar and strike at the iron with its paw, but it was helpless.

Q: I think you said a couple of lion cubs or others would playfully attack the rod, and the jarring would create bruises and scratches on the handlers.

Hoagland: Well, it wouldn't be scratches, but I suppose they could



jam it against your hand, just like if you were angry at them you could jam it against them. I don't remember that at all from my book but if it's in there it happened, yeah.

Q: You obviously spent a good deal of time observing their behavior. The behavior of the cats was as fascinating as the behavior of humans. How did you retain this information? You didn't keep a diary.

Hoagland: It just filled me not just with love but with fascination with life, life in its fullest. And this book is life in this particular form, in this wondrous form with the circus.

Q: What happened after the book was published in terms of your writing. You went on with other subject matter.

Hoagland: The book didn't sell very well. Around 6,000 copies hardcover. And as I said it's been reprinted by four paperback companies. In fact, it's still in print but it hasn't made money for them. So it's not that it has sold very well.



Double stake driver at work in Milwaukee, July 24, 1951. Sverre O. Braathen photo used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.

Q: Yes, but it is one of those books circus historians need to have in their libraries.

Hoagland: I'm very glad about that, yeah.

Q: Did you return at all to the circus?

Hoagland: I still love to go to a public circus [Circus Smirkus] which is only 50 miles from my home. I haven't been to Ringling Bros. since Bill Ballantine died. I did propose to *National Geographic* that they have me do a story on the circus . . . Ringling Bros. trains now, or the actual circus. The text people said yes, but the photography people said they couldn't find a photographer who was interested. And then we said, "Ok. How about if you're not interested in an American circus, how about a European circus?" So I contacted my contacts like Al Stencell [a former Canadian circus owner and historian], Rob Mermin [founder of Circus Smirkus and, at the time, dean of the Ringling Bros. Clown College], and Toby Ballantine, Bill Ballantine's son, who was a clown. I wanted them to pinpoint an ideal European circus for me to write about. He finally picked out a Swiss circus, because the folks at *National Geographic* said they hadn't done a story in Switzerland for a while. So I didn't

do a French circus or a German circus. The whole thing was so discouraging. I finally said, "Ok, fine, I'll do anything." But then the photography department said, "We can't find a photographer we want who wants to do it. So now you can't."

Q: How did the circus change your life? For example, you're living in Manhattan for a while and then you go to Vermont. Why?

Hoagland: I lived 30 years in Manhattan. And I've had this place in Vermont, it's now 43 years; it's my heart's home. Well, I think I have to have two homes. I wouldn't be content staying here on this island [Martha's Vineyard, off Cape Cod] all year round ever. But also in Manhattan, even though I love Manhattan infinitely more than this island, or staying all year round in my cabin in Vermont, I need to have at least two separate worlds which means a whole circle of acquaintances and friends and actions, so to speak, I mean human and spiritual—all the circles of life.

Thoreau would come back here, but he only spent two years at

Walden Pond, you know, and he says at the end of the book *Walden*, he says, "People ask me why I'm leaving. I have other lives to lead." And that explains it. I have other lives to lead besides my love and persona in New York. In the wilderness in Vermont I have no electricity or phone. I live by daylight. I wake up in the sun, and I go to sleep when the sun goes down. Oh, I have kerosene lamps, but my eyes aren't good enough to read by them, and so I go to sleep. But I wouldn't want to do that all year round. I have a city life or sophisticated life to lead as well as the natural life.

Q: I read in the *New Yorker* article [of May 22, 2000] that you compared Manhattan and Vermont to a circus life. On the road for so many months, then off. It's like so many circus people who can't wait for the season to end and then, two weeks after they're home, they can't wait for the next season to begin.

Hoagland: Yeah, it's not a couple of weeks but a couple of months, and the whole thing is perhaps as we were saying . . . the giraffe man that slept with the fat woman on the road and therefore could travel in her compartment on the second train, and you know how she supported him [with] new clothes and laid in bed and everything. The question always was or is—in carnivals, too—at the end of the season, was

he going to take off or was he going to spend the winter with her in Sarasota? Which I'm sure he didn't.

Q: How did it feel at the end of your 1952 tour, the second season? Did you know at that point that was going to be it for Ringling Bros.?

Hoagland: Yeah. I knew I'd spent probably almost all the time I'd be able to spend, but also almost all the time I needed to spend. Only I did keep going back to the circus long after. I used to write reviews for *The Village Voice*, for example. And I did that *Esquire* feature and I did the introduction to Edward Kelty's photographs. So unlike boxing—I wish I had never gone back there. I don't like it anymore. I wrote the book and that was it—but I perpetually care about . . . I mean the circus is a vast subject unlike boxing or any other sport in my mind. The circus is a paradigm for life itself. We spend a certain portion of it on the high wire or slack wire. We spend a certain portion of it as clowns. We spend a certain portion of it as bums or derelicts or lost souls. We spend a certain portion of it as ballet girls or whatever. I mean, life is a trip in the best sense.



It's been a trip that's been perpetually useful to me.

I never make reservations. When I landed in Khartoum to write my Africa book, which is one of my best books—this was in 1977—I had no reservations. People on the airplane couldn't believe it. You know, all these salesmen for John Deere or whatever. And when I'd fly into Bombay and Nairobi I had no reservations. I'd just see what happens. And the fact that you have no reservations means people will help you. Like in Khartoum, that John Deere salesman 20 years younger than me, or 10, or whatever, he took me under his wing and he gave me a ride to his hotel. They had no room for me, so they put me up in a servant's room up on the top. I didn't give a damn. And then after a while a room opened up. But by then they had gotten very fond of me, and of course the clerks all worked for the secret police in all these hotels.

In my Africa book I traveled by hitchhiking all over. They had no roads, hardly any roads. So no matter where you went, you hitchhiked on freight trucks. You paid your way to ride in the cab with the driver; paid less because the ordinary passengers rode on top of the freight in the open, clinging onto a rope to avoid being thrown off and then being left to die of thirst if no one noticed you'd fallen off. I paid to ride in the cab. I had no idea when I'd be coming back; it just depended on what happened. We'd stop at dark. There were no roads so you couldn't drive after dark. The driver had to see the desert, see the tracks of other trucks. We'd sleep in the sand next to the truck, and when dawn came, we'd carry little rations and each person had his own rations and his own drinking water, and we'd drive on. There'd be roadblocks and stopping for police patrols.

Eventually I'd come back to the hotel and I'd walk into the hotel lobby, having been sleeping in the sand for five days, all sandy, filthy. There'd be a long line of people from the airport—white people, Europeans, in a column. I'd just get in at the end of the line and when I reached the desk, the clerk would say, "Oh, Mr. Hoagland, we have your room—Room 305. Here's your key." And as I walked away toward the elevator I'd hear him say, "Mr. Jones, did you make a reservation. Mr. Jones, I don't see your reservations here. Are you sure you FAXed them?" He'd be pretending to look through a drawer full of reservations. "I don't see any Jones here. I'm sorry. You must have neglected to . . . why don't you try the Hilton. We don't have any room for you." So I'd be going to his room up the elevator, and he'd be going to the Hilton.

Q: Winding up now. In 25,000 words or less, complete the statement: "I am glad that circus entered my life because . . ."

Hoagland: Well, of course, it didn't enter my life. I sought it. Which is what I did with Africa: I sought Africa. I went to the Natural History Museum. Somehow it worked because I was a nine-year-old, and I have to give my father credit. I gazed at those dioramas. I was too young to vow that I was going to all these places. I didn't imagine that. Who could? How could you go to all these vast, wonderful places. But I've been to all of them because I wanted to. And I went to Antarctica because I wanted to. And I

went to Yemen because I wanted to. Also the phone rang. They'd say, "Do you want to go to Yemen?" "Sure." "Want to go to China?" "Yes." I would always say "yes." But in the circus's case, the phone didn't ring. I was a kid. The phone didn't ring and say, "Do you want to write about the circus?" No, I just went. I had assumed I would be working with the horses. I didn't dream I was going to be with the "animals" in the menagerie. And I got asthma from hay so how was I going to survive? I didn't know. But I wanted to join the circus. And so it was a great relief when the cowboy said, "This isn't the animal department, you dope." I'm not going to die! Elephants eat hay, too.

"This isn't the animal department." Then I knew I was going to live because I don't have to be handling hay all day long. And then instead of a live horse, it was a dead horse on the ground. Poor thing. I had to handle a little hay for the hippo, of course, but not very much. So no, it [circus] didn't enter my life.

What you should do, what everyone should do is seek what they love. And, of course, they seek to marry someone they love. But seek work that you love, and then once you find the line of work that you love, which I did right away, starting from fifteen. I would have been happy being a zoologist also but not as happy because I'm not a scientist. My mind does not work that way. I'm an impressionist in a certain sense, or an artist in certain sense. But when you find your line of work, then whoever artist you want to think of . . . van Gogh may have been crazy and miserable, but he could paint what he loved.

Q: And it just happened that your first training in word form was the circus.

Hoagland: No, it didn't just happen.

Q: I understand. But the circus was the vehicle.

Hoagland: Yes, and that prepared me to go to the British Columbia wilderness; I was not frightened of moose and grizzly bears. I was sensibly respectful. I didn't challenge them. I didn't infringe on their space. I didn't get killed by them. But I wasn't afraid to be in the wilderness . . . the wolves . . . I wasn't afraid of the wolves. How can the wolf be more scary than the tiger? And when I lived on the lower east side of New York. It was the meatpacking district with all these drug dealers and stuff. They weren't as scary as a tiger. They were just people. Of course I wasn't going to challenge them. You'd just get shot if you wanted to ask for trouble. But I was just trying to live my life and "I'm living my life, and you deal your drugs and I'm not going to call the cops and just don't bother me and I won't bother you." In the Army I was in the peacetime army and had basic training. What's so scary about basic training when you've been in the circus? I mean it's simple. BW

*Lane Talburt began interviewing circus personalities in 1999. He has been hooked on feature professional interviews since his first newspaper assignment while a high school student in the summer of 1956.*



*Edward Hoagland, author of Cat Man, at Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, April 20, 2012. Lane Talburt Photo.*



# KELLY MILLER

AMERICA'S ONE RING WONDER  
FOUNDED IN 1938

BEST WISHES FOR THE HOLIDAYS

FROM THE  
NORTH AND  
ROYAL  
FAMILIES  
AND  
EVERYONE  
AT THE  
KELLY MILLER  
CIRCUS

Photo courtesy of the Hugo  
Area Chamber of Commerce





## *Here Comes the Bride*

### **Lavinia Warren as Mrs. Tom Thumb**

by Kate Browne

*Barnum towers over George Nutt, Tom and Lavinia Thumb, and Minnie Warren in this strange image in which the subjects' faces are borderline grotesque. Almost certainly dating from 1863, the back of the card describes Lavinia's wedding gown in great detail. Used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.*

usually prompted at least a knowing nod. Of all the marvelous places I planned to visit, I looked forward the most to going to Mountain Grove Cemetery. I learned that Lavinia was buried in the same plot as Tom, and I wanted to pay my respects in person. I arrived at the cemetery and found the plot easily, owing to the life-size statue of Tom Thumb on top of the Stratton monument. I searched all sides of the monument for Lavinia's name. I looked at the surrounding headstones—nothing. I finally noticed the Daughters of the American Revolution emblem on the front of one of the headstones, and when I looked closely at the top, the stone was so worn I could barely read “Wife.” This woman, whose life story I came to care about so deeply, and who I knew to be a remarkable person, lost her name when she died. I perceived this as a great loss, and resolved to learn as much about her as I could.

It is easy to find basic information on Tom Thumb.

Charles Sherwood Stratton was born on January 4, 1838 in Bridgeport, Connecticut to Sherwood Edward and Cynthia Stratton. According to a biographical sketch, Tom “grew, daily, like other children, until he attained the age of eighteen months, when Nature put a veto on his further upward progress, and ordered him forever afterwards to remain in statu[s]quo.”<sup>1</sup> He began performing under the management of his distant cousin P.T. Barnum at five under the name Tom Thumb. The name stuck, and during his early performing years Tom's fame skyrocketed to the level of international entertainment superstar. Though Tom did not have the distinction of being the smallest performing boy (although this did not keep Barnum from the claim), he possessed a special charm that endeared him to audiences. Unfortunately, like contemporary child stars, this fame did not last. As Tom aged, he lost some of the adorable impishness that contributed to his boyhood success. Tom also faced an incredible amount of competition as performers of small stature were featured in many popular entertainments including circuses, dime museums, fairs, and vaudeville theatres. Barnum's attempts to counteract the effects of time by misleading

I first encountered Lavinia Warren while researching women in vaudeville. Working backward from the early twentieth century, I started learning more about women who performed in circus and sideshow when I came across a *carte de visite* titled “Mrs. Tom Thumb and Baby.” Anyone familiar with American popular culture in the nineteenth century has surely come across the name Tom Thumb in relation to P.T. Barnum, but Mrs. Tom Thumb? And baby? Since I started researching the role of women in circus, my main concern has been to learn more about the off-stage lives of performing women whose stories have been omitted from traditional sources used to construct biographies. Too many women's lives are lost to history because they are covered as a “Mrs.” As in the case of Lavinia Warren, even the most popular women remained nameless.

In the course of my research on Lavinia, I took my first trip to Bridgeport, Connecticut in the fall of 2006. Even in the Thumbs' former hometown, I had difficulty explaining my research to interested parties. I stopped saying that I was in town to learn about Lavinia Warren. No one recognized the name. “Mrs. Tom Thumb”



audiences about Tom's real age wore thin. Even though he maintained a rigorous travel schedule, his popularity eventually waned. With the added pressure of maintaining the life of luxury to which he had grown accustomed, Tom Thumb needed a boost in popularity that would ensure his continued commercial success.

Around the same time Barnum considered what the future held for his popular protégée, a young woman from Middleborough, Massachusetts planned the next step in her career. Mercy Lavinia Warren Bump was the fifth child to James and Huldah Bump. All of Lavinia's older brothers and sisters were of average height, and Lavinia's growth progressed as expected through her first year. She grew slowly until ten years old at which point she stopped at thirty two inches. She developed easy friendships in school and enjoyed learning. The local school board offered sixteen year old Lavinia a job as a primary school teacher upon an expansion of the district. She took the job as a primary school teacher and must have had a successful first year. Lavinia writes in her memoir that, "at the end of the term [I] received the commendation and thanks of the committee for the excellent discipline I maintained, as well as the progress made by the pupils under my tuition."<sup>2</sup> At this point, she started to settle in to the idea of teaching as her vocation, but a distant relation made her family an offer that would alter the course of her life.

Lavinia claims that neither she nor her family ever considered "a career as a public character," but given her age and close relationship with her family, a considerable amount of money must have changed hands to inspire Lavinia to reconsider teaching. She claims that "Colonel" Joseph H. Wood, manager of Spalding and Rogers showboats *Banjo* and *James Raymond*, was a distant cousin who visited her family in 1857 and offered her a position on the show. It is unclear whether Wood was actually related to the family as Lavinia begins her autobiographical memoir with a report on her lineage with extremely strong ties to Massachusetts and Wood was a native of Weedsport, New York. More likely, Lavinia could not admit wanting to pursue a career as a "public character."<sup>3</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, teaching was one of the few acceptable jobs for young, unmarried women, and even then it was assumed that once a woman wed she would abandon work outside the home. Her parents both descended from respectable New England families with roots to passengers on the *Mayflower*. Later in her



*Lavinia Warren exposes a little ankle while expressing a come hither look in this c.1862 carte de visite taken at Matthew Brady's studio. Used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.*



*Lavinia in a c.1862 carte de visite taken at the studio of Charles D. Fredricks & Co. in New York. Used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.*

life, Lavinia was a proud member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Although not wealthy, the Bump family farmed land in Middleborough that afforded them a comfortable living. Economic hardship did not drive Lavinia to the stage, but whether for love of an audience or simply the promise of lucrative future earnings, she left a respectable, stable job as a teacher for the unpredictable chaos of show business.

When she joined Spaulding and Rogers Floating Palace, she shortened her name to Lavinia Bump. *The Middleborough Gazette* reported on Lavinia's performances with a brief article on May 29, 1858: "Female Tom Thumb—Middleboro seems destined to be celebrated for its unique characters. We learn that a young lady at sweet 17, perfectly formed, and beautiful withal, from this place, is now on exhibition in the South. Her height is only twenty-eight inches, and her weight proportionately small. Her friends receive for her services high compensation, while she is well cared for. We understand she has a younger sister still smaller of stature even for her age. Both are wanted to go abroad, but the parents could not spare both at once. Further particulars to be given hereafter."

Similar reports from *The Middleborough Gazette* in the summer of 1858 include "Queen of Lilliput on exhibition in St. Louis," and "Middleboro native, rival of Tom Thumb, tours 22 states." After touring for three seasons, Lavinia returned to her family home in Middleborough and continued performing in small, local theatres and for special events in the community. If her time with Spalding and Rogers could be considered a brief, rebellious stint of an impulsive teenager, Lavinia may have been happy with these minor performances upon her return and settled back into familiar Middleborough life. She may even have returned to her teaching job. But time and time again Lavinia chose the life of a performer and took specific action to ensure her place in public life.

Although crowds came to Lavinia's performances for the novelty of her short stature more than her singing or acting ability, she struggled with height as the focus of her popularity. She wrote in her autobiography of cringing when audience members treated her as a child rather than a grown woman, and bristled at the popular science of the day that equated brain size with intellect. A.H. Saxon remarked that several times in her manuscript Lavinia crossed out or changed the copy of newspaper articles she quoted that referred



to her as a “dwarf.”<sup>4</sup> Because of her status as one of Barnum’s exhibits, her abnormal height played a part in the development of her career, but her insistence at redirecting the focus from her size makes it difficult to detail the content of her performances. She wanted to be known as a singer and actress, not a humbug or human oddity.

While Tom and Lavinia may be the most well-known performing midget couple of the nineteenth century, they were certainly in good company. Dozens of small-statured performers toured the United States. Of course, most performers claimed to be the smallest, lightest, most beautiful, or most intelligent. The feature of proportionate dwarfism that visually distinguished midgets from dwarfs was a result of an underactive pituitary gland. Where genetic dwarfism often resulted in disproportionate limbs and other significant differences in bone structure, midgets had the benefit of appearing “perfectly formed.” This pituitary deficiency often resulted from inbreeding, and a cursory family history reveals frequent marriages between cousins in both Tom and Lavinia’s families. As advances in medical science, nutrition, and social stigma against inbreeding increased, incidences of proportionate dwarfism decreased so that only genetic dwarfism remains today. The term “midget” is no longer appropriate in contemporary contexts, given its inflammatory history as a slur, but is appropriate historically to describe these performers. The only difference between midgets and people of average stature was height, yet performers and managers quickly transformed a rather insignificant difference into a whole mode of presentation. Robert Bogdan called the packaging of midgets as royal, aristocratic, or elite as the “high aggrandized” mode. It is in this way that Tom Thumb became “General” Tom Thumb for the remainder of his performing career despite never serving in the military.

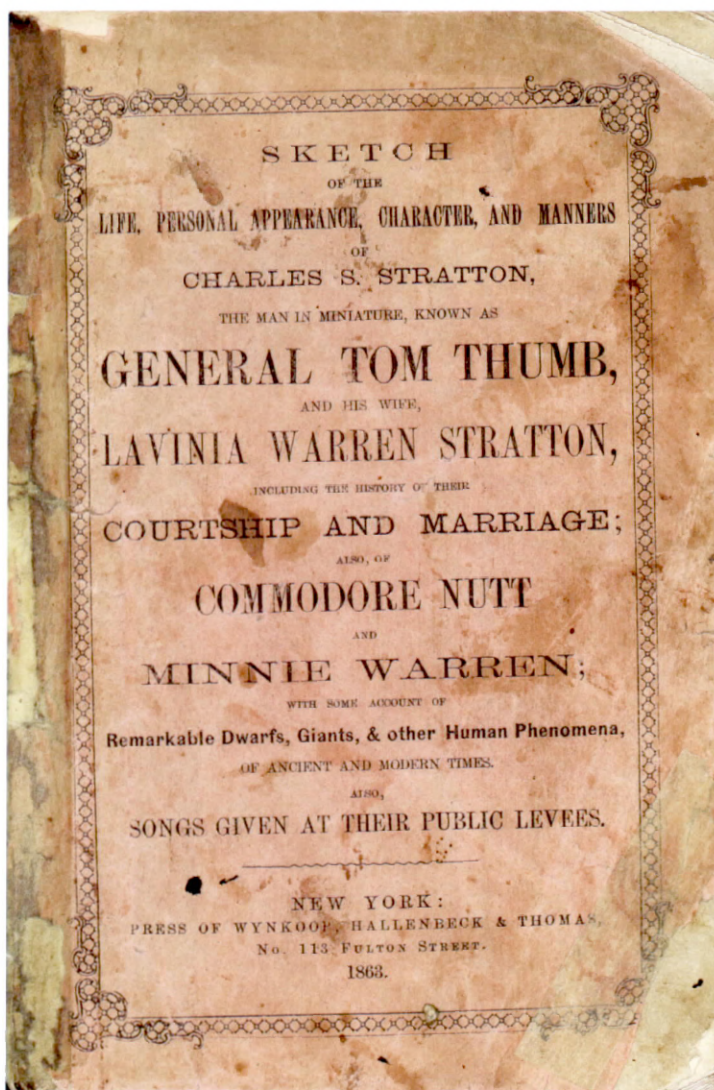
One explanation for the immense popularity of midget performances in the Victorian era was the changing notions of childhood. Social reforms such as child labor laws, education requirements, and a growing concern over dismal mortality rates were coupled with an attitudinal shift toward childhood as a protected period of development marked by innocence. Victorian Americans adopted the British sentimentality toward children and childhood, which was reflected in the popularity of proportionate midget performers who existed in the grey area between naivety and sophistication, innocence and deviance, and, especially for female performers, sexual purity and experience.

Victorian ideals for childhood worked in conjunction with ideals for women as protectors of children and the family, and Lavinia was caught squarely in the middle of these demands as a female midget performer. *The Sketch of the Life* pamphlet first published in 1863 described Lavinia with sexual overtones made all the more disturbing by the suggestion that audiences could view her as a mature child, childish woman, or some combination of both: “Her size is that of a child, her language that of an adult. She is a woman in miniature, weighing twenty-nine pounds, and measuring thirty-two inches in height. The reader may choose from his lady acquaintances a sparkling woman, with dark hair and black eyes, symmetrical figure and soft voice, and, in his imagination, reduce her to the dimensions above named, leaving her mental and moral faculties fully expanded, and he will have an idea of this charming little woman; or, he may reverse the picture, and select a child of perfect mold, with a finely-arched brow, dimpled cheeks, large, lustrous eyes, a nicely-chiseled mouth, a rich harvest of hair, and suddenly endow her with all the attributes and accomplishments

of womanhood—a heart to love, a head to contrive, and a hand to execute—giving her wit, imagination, humor, judgment, & etc. He may fancy such a child using elegant language—appreciating music, poetry, eloquence, painting, and statuary—traveling unattended (as she has done, from Boston to Buffalo), going through the streets shopping—waltzing in the ball-room—singing sentimental and patriotic songs—writing letters to friends—keeping a journal, etc.”

Though these autobiographical pamphlets contained some truth about the lives of the performers, they were embellished, sensational stories intended for sale to the audience. As the information in the true life pamphlets recirculated in later editions and newspaper articles covering the couple’s performances, the legend of Tom and Lavinia based on the pamphlet became indistinguishable from their actual life story. Many years later, when writing her autobiography, Lavinia diligently maintained her image to avoid disrupting the way her audience thought of her. This adds to the contention that Lavinia purposefully planned her performance career.

As did *The Middleborough Gazette*, newspapers also referred to Lavinia as “The Queen of Lilliputia,” or “The Midget Queen.” From observing the trajectory of Tom Thumb’s career, Lavinia knew



Interest in the February 1863 Charles Stratton-Lavinia Warren marriage was so great that a 52 page pamphlet was published soon after the nuptials. It detailed all aspects of the wedding, including a six page account of the wedding gifts. It was reprinted through at least 1867. Pfening Archives.



that the claim of smallest midget performer in the country would only take her so far, so her advertisements focused on her beauty, virtue, and intelligence. She also based her performances on singing popular songs, dancing, and acting out skits to create a unique show called a *levee*. Novelty requires constant innovation to keep ahead, and Lavinia had a keen sense of her competition. She knew she would have to set herself apart from the rest, and getting back into performing full time at twenty she knew time was not on her side.

In 1862, Lavinia's chief rival was a ten year old girl named Alice Marie "Dolly" Dutton. Billed as "The Little Fairy," and "an infinitely greater curiosity than Gen. Tom Thumb," she performed under her father's management, and ads depicted her standing in his hand.<sup>5</sup> Both Dolly and Lavinia performed levees of songs, skits, and other genteel entertainments. However, Lavinia was slightly taller and weighed more than Dolly. The added hindrance of being ten years older did not do her any favors. Reading newspaper coverage from Dolly's appearances in Middleborough must have stung as Lavinia and her similarly diminutive sister Huldah "Minnie" Warren were the opening act for Dolly.

The *Middleborough Gazette* reported on the event: "Doll[y] Dutton, assisted by the two Misses Bumps of this town gave levees . . . the past week. It was a chaste, beautiful entertainment."<sup>6</sup> The newspaper that once dubbed her "Queen of Lilliputia" and "The Female Tom Thumb" (titles strikingly similar to Dolly's advertisements), could not be bothered to mention her by name now. Lavinia needed something to shake things up, and she needed it soon.

According to both Barnum's autobiography *Struggles and Triumphs* and Lavinia's writing for the *New York Tribune Sunday Magazine* that later became the basis for Saxon's edition of her autobiography, Barnum initiated contact with Lavinia and her family to negotiate an agreement to perform at his American Museum having heard about her from the press and verbal accounts of her performances.<sup>7</sup> This claim seems dubious given that the best press she received was several years old by this time, she only performed locally, and not even her hometown newspaper reported on her shows.

It is also possible that Lavinia made contact with one of Barnum's associates or Tom himself during his performances at the American Hall in Middleborough during June of 1861.<sup>8</sup> Lavinia wrote in her autobiography of traveling to Boston to see Tom perform at Barnum's Aquarial Gardens in September of 1862. This is also a plausible moment of connection, especially since she wrote that Barnum contacted her family in the autumn of 1862.<sup>9</sup>

Lavinia competed with scores of other midget performers, and beauty would only take her so far for so long. In her quest to be seen as a shining example of a most proper, chaste, and respectable woman, she could not claim or insinuate that she behaved in a manner contrary to expectations by seeking out Barnum. Proper, chaste, and respectable women in the 1860s did not seek out opportunities to work outside the home, and, if they did, they

certainly did not work as performers. The only acceptable way to explain their business ties was for Barnum to have approached her family for permission to employ Lavinia in his American Museum. It also subtly reinforced the image of Lavinia as a desirable commodity. On the heels of his bankruptcy, Barnum shared her goal of making her debut as commercially successful as Tom's.<sup>10</sup> As such, Barnum also had a stake in upholding the idea that Lavinia possessed proper Victorian poise and comportment in his constant battle for the approval and money of women and families. To tell a story that gave Lavinia any real control over her career would have violated the image of Lavinia as a perfect "woman in miniature."<sup>11</sup>

If there is any doubt that Lavinia's story is exempt from the same fanciful exaggeration that Barnum used in the promotion of his other exhibits, her contract proves otherwise. Lavinia signed a contract with Barnum on December 11, 1862. Despite the version of the story in which her parents were involved with every step of the negotiation, only Lavinia's name and signature appeared on the document. Per the contract, Lavinia would remain under contract for four years and would receive incremental salary increases, \$520 per week for the first two years, \$620 for the third, and \$780 for the fourth.<sup>12</sup>

In January 1863, newspapers began printing correspondence between Lavinia and Barnum in which she refused his invitation to appear at the American Museum even after he offered her \$1,000 per week because she had been invited to perform in Europe. Only when her trip abroad was postponed because of a jeweler's mistake in creating "her jewels" did she accept Barnum's offer.<sup>13</sup> While this explanation seems preposterous today, it obviously was considered plausible a century and half ago, perhaps because such an over-reaction mimicked the behavior of high society matrons. A woman this haughty might be worth seeing.

Clearly, Barnum wrote the exchange himself to promote Lavinia as a cosmopolitan attraction in high demand to entice audiences to visit her during her "limited engagement." Finally, broadsides began to advertise her final appearance at the American Museum on February 7, 1863 as she prepared for her marriage to Tom Thumb.

Whether contrived by Barnum as a profitable publicity stunt or an expression of the genuine love between two popular young

people, the wedding of Tom Thumb to Lavinia Warren revived Tom's fading career. Tom had what can best be described as an intermittent business partnership with Barnum in the early 1860s. In 1860, Tom advertised his appearances as "no longer under an engagement to any individual."<sup>14</sup> By 1862 he was back with Barnum appearing in his Aquarial Gardens in Boston, but at the time of Lavinia's debut he "had no engagement."<sup>15</sup> If Barnum simply wanted two of his performers to marry, he could have chosen George Washington Morrison "Commodore" Nutt, "the \$30,000 Nutt," who performed at the American Museum during the same period as Lavinia. Indeed, the January 31, 1863 *Harper's Weekly* eluded to the



Lavinia in another c.1862 image taken at the Fredricks studio. Used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.





MARRIAGE IN MINIATURE.

Sketch of the Stratton-Warren wedding on February 10, 1863 from the 1888 edition of P. T. Barnum's autobiography. Pfening Archives.

possibility of either romantic candidate in their coverage of Lavinia's performance. Barnum could have written to his countless contacts to send him a suitable mate for Lavinia. He could have asked for several men and turned the whole affair into spectacle over who would marry Lavinia. In her memoir, Lavinia declined to write about her engagement to Tom and merely quoted Barnum's account in *Struggles and Triumphs* after she admitted that "it is probable that many people have regarded my marriage with General Tom Thumb as a purely professional and mercenary arrangement."<sup>16</sup>

It cannot be overstated that everyone involved in the production of the wedding had a financial stake in its success. Newspapers previously reported that Tom was married in 1855 to a Miss Vinton of Bridgeport, Connecticut.<sup>17</sup> It was stated in 1860 that Tom was "about to be wed" to an unnamed woman.<sup>18</sup> That these news items have escaped mention in every biographical sketch published thereafter either means that the claims were fiction or that the news was so inconsequential to the public that it was easy for Barnum to keep the information hidden permanently. In either case, previous attempts to publicize Tom Thumb's marriage flopped. This time, impeccable timing and a keen sense of what piqued public curiosity created the media frenzy we in the twenty-first century recognize as a "celebrity wedding."

"The Fairy Wedding" on February 10, 1863 cemented the style and scope of celebrity wedding news coverage that has lasted 150 years and counting. In turn, celebrity wedding news shapes the way ordinary women plan their weddings and conceptualize their time

as a bride. As Tom's alleged nuptial announcements showed, even the weddings of notable Americans rarely received more than one or two sentences of coverage. The Fairy Wedding capitalized on timing in two ways. First, its design mimicked the style of wedding enjoyed by European royalty, which were extremely popular with American women. Second, and perhaps most importantly, it was the right time for a distraction from the national tragedy of the Civil War. The wedding literally pushed updates from the battlefield off the front page of major newspapers like the *Chicago Tribune*. Rather than a wedding being an event that only women cared about, coverage in the major papers showed that it was truly a notable American event.

That Tom Thumb and Lavinia Warren shared Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's February 10 wedding day may be coincidental, but the similarities between the weddings did not stop there. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's 1840 wedding deserves credit for introducing a new, modern style of celebration, and many of the trappings would be familiar to wedding guests today. Queen Victoria wore an elaborately embellished white dress and ornate accessories and was accompanied by several bridesmaids. A large, white, decorated cake was served at the reception. Her daughter Victoria added to the white wedding style in 1858 by introducing music to the ceremony processional. All of these new traditions were publicized in *Godey's Lady's Book*, a popular women's magazine in the United States. Women recognized Lavinia's dress, accessories, jewelry, and shoes as fashionable choices, thereby elevating her



# FAIRY BRIDE POLKA



This picture is not of Lavinia in the Year 1863, but of her in the Church of the Episcopate, in the Year 1863.

AS PERFORMED AT THE LEVEE'S OF  
GENERAL TOM THUMB AND LADY, COM' NUTT & MISS MINNIE WARREN.

COMPOSED BY

**G. R. CROMWELL.**

G. R. Cromwell, a noted composer, wrote the Fairy Bride Polka in honor of Lavinia. A later edition of this sheet music depicted only the bride, groom, best man, and maid of honor on the cover. Lester S. Levy Collection of Sheet Music at the Milton S. Eisenhower Library of The Johns Hopkins University.

status. In her memoir, Lavinia again deferred to the writing of others to describe her wedding, adding only that, "to me as to every other woman, my marriage was the most important event of my life, and as I look back upon it, I think I can safely say that no other event ever occasioned so great public in interest in me as did that."<sup>19</sup>

The day after the wedding, several New York City newspapers including the *Tribune Herald*, *World*, *Sun*, *Evening Post*, and *Commercial Advertiser* "laid before their readers graphic accounts of the marriage. Several of the above-mentioned papers devoting

upwards of two and three columns of their space to elaborate reports of a wedding, the like of which never before was seen in any country, and which, unless the seconds in the affair should prove imitators, cannot be duplicated in this century."<sup>20</sup>

The February 11, 1863 *New York Times* printed "The Loving Lilliputians," the most comprehensive coverage of the wedding festivities. This account was reprinted in newspapers across the country and used as a source in both the *Sketch of the Life* pamphlet and Lavinia's autobiography. The opening paragraph sets an excited tone and established the wedding as the social event of the season: "Those who did and those who did not attend the wedding of Gen. Thomas Thumb and Queen LAVINIA WARREN composed the population of this great Metropolis yesterday, and thenceforth religious and civil parties sink into comparative insignificance before this one arbitrating query of fate—Did you or did you not see Tom Thumb married?"

The anonymous author of the article used this elevated language throughout the piece along with no small amount of cheeky wit to describe the wedding in detail. With poetic flourish, he elaborated the story of how Tom and Lavinia met by describing their meeting at Barnum's Aquarial Gardens. "She encountered her destiny—she met her 'gray-eyed man.' Tom, while gazing at her through the chill atmosphere of Boston, alternately shivered and quivered. He literally fell desperately in love with her, and vowed his little vows, backed by the sternest of oaths."<sup>21</sup> Then, as today, the *New York Times* was a guide to wedding details that mattered to readers. For example, "The Church was comfortably filled by an audience comprising representatives of each and every strata of New-York's respectable society."

Despite Lavinia, Tom, and Barnum's assurances that potential increases in fame and fortune did not factor into decisions about the wedding, the choice of location proved otherwise. Rather than host a ceremony in Middleborough, following the custom of holding the nuptials in the bride's home church, Barnum specifically chose Grace Episcopal Church. As a compromise, Lavinia's pastor attended. "The ceremony was performed by the Rev. Mr. Willey of Bridgeport, Connecticut; the bride was given away, at the request of her parents, by the Rev. Dr. Putnam of Middleboro; and the benediction was pronounced by the Rev. Dr. Taylor, rector of Grace Church."<sup>22</sup> As the new white wedding custom dictated, Tom and Lavinia, accompanied by maid of honor Minnie Warren and best man Commodore Nutt, proceeded down the long aisle on their wedding day.



Grace Episcopal Church, located about a mile from the American Museum, had a reputation as a fashionable Manhattan church well before the current building was built in 1846, but increased after enjoying the privilege of hosting the Fairy Wedding.<sup>23</sup> Though Barnum originally wanted to sell \$60 tickets to the ceremony in the 2,000 seat church, the move to invitation-only enhanced the image of the wedding as an exclusive event. Though the *New York Times* noted that many notable, high society people attended, it refused to publish (or, in its word, "newspaperize") names of private citizens, "but the appearance of Maj.-Gen. BURNSIDE we may mention with propriety. The gallant soldier looked well and hearty, and received the evident regard of the audience with ease and dignity."<sup>24</sup> *Sketch of the Life* also recalled the social atmosphere of the church as one "crowded with a gay assemblage of the youth, beauty, wealth, and worth of the metropolis."<sup>25</sup>

After the ceremony ended, all those who waited outside the church to catch a glimpse of the couple (and certainly all the social notables inside the church) congregated outside in a procession to the Metropolitan Hotel for the reception. "Policemen were detailed to preserve order in the vicinity of the hotel, as well as of the church. Vehicles were turned off the main thoroughfare at Houston and Spring streets, and the long line of carriages which was noticed at the church, came pouring down toward the place of reception. The crowd followed, and in less than fifteen minutes the street in front of the hotel block was completely choked with human beings," wrote the *New York Times* of February 11. Taking into account the article's likely sensational embellishment, the disruption of traffic and suspension of everyday activities this Tuesday must have meant that the Fairy Wedding meant a great deal to the people of Manhattan.

The *New York Times* spent a considerable amount of its February 11, 1863 article describing Lavinia's appearance, noting, for example, "Queen Lavinia appeared, soberly speaking, to great advantage." The attention to detail was unusual. To summarize her ensemble, the author noted that "her head was overlaid by the absurdities of fashion, and her hair-rig generally was not marked with good taste, but her tout ensemble, her whole, was singularly attractive." The article went on to detail not only the overall look of the dress, veil, bouquet, shoes, and jewelry, but also described the luxury materials used in it such as satin, silk, pearls, lace, and diamonds.

Lavinia's jewels drew a great deal of attention. The *Times* continued, "The brooch consisted of a cluster in form of a star. The



General and Mrs. Tom Thumb in their wedding outfits. Photo by Matthew Brady or one of his assistants. Pfening Archives.

ear-rings are solitaires with pear shaped pendants. The veil was fastened with two diamond hair-pins, with three pendants to each. The bracelets correspond with the brooch, and are of star design. The necklace was superb, forming leaves of diamonds, each diamond and accompanying pendant resembling sparkling dew-drops."<sup>26</sup> Perhaps, as today, the description of her jewelry sparked a bit of jealousy from readers who wished for a similar ensemble, but it also reinforced Lavinia's position as a woman of high status, further separating her from her competitors.

"The breath-expurgating, crinoline-crushing, bunion-pinching mass of conglomerated humanity," the *Times* continued, "that rushed eagerly to view other portions of the all-absorbing ceremonies, likewise congregated at the bridal reception at the Metropolitan Hotel. . . ." Barnum sold tickets to the reception for \$75 each and had to turn would-be customers away after selling out. This was more than the price he wanted to set for tickets for the ceremony, and since the Metropolitan Hotel could hold just as many people as the church, he may have seen this as an opportunity to capitalize on

the lost ceremony income. The guests, for their part, ensured that their presence would be properly and thoroughly noticed. Both the *New York Times* and the *Sketch of the Life* printed the entire list of gifts and who gave them. In this case, it seemed appropriate to "newspaperize" the high standing of people who attended the ceremony by their gifts. Socialites like Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt, Mrs. William Bassett, Mrs. James Gordon Bennett, Mrs. Greeley, Mrs. Ashwell, and Mrs. E. N. Roosevelt, to name a few, brought exquisite household gifts made of gold, silver, bronze, porcelain,



The wedding party: Commodore George Nutt (l.), General Tom Thumb, Mrs. Tom Thumb, and Minnie Warren. Photo by Matthew Brady or one of his assistants. Used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.





THE RECEPTION.

Drawing of the newlyweds with their best man and maid of honor at their wedding reception at the Metropolitan Hotel. Used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.

silk, pearl, and "silver spoons, castors, forks, nut pickers and napkin rings enough to make the newly married humming birds sing most discordant notes when the United States tax gatherer comes to collect the Government tax on plate."<sup>27</sup> For their effort, guests were sent home with a souvenir piece of wedding cake which, prior to slicing, "weighed eighty pound . . . in point of beauty and workmanship, it was the nonpareil of bridal cake."<sup>28</sup>

The *New York Times* had little to say about the honeymoon, other than that, "It is understood that the little General and his wife will proceed to Washington to-morrow." In her memoir Lavinia quoted a detailed account of the reception held by the Lincolns at the White House from the *Washington Star* before adding her perspective. "When Mr. Lincoln stooped his towering form to greet us, there was a peculiarly quizzical expression in his eye, which almost made me laugh outright. Knowing his predilection for storytelling, I imagined he was about to utter something of a humorous nature; but he only said, with a genial smile, 'Mrs. Stratton, I wish you much happiness in your union.'"<sup>29</sup>

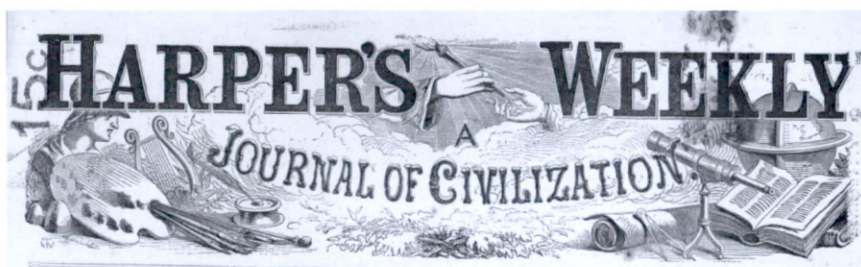
The reception was attended by the Lincolns and

Tom and Lavinia made the cover of the February 21, 1863 Harper's Weekly, an indication of the public's fascination with the pair. The artist did a terrible job on Lavinia. Her facial features have only a passing resemblance to photos of her and she appears to lack a neck. Pfening Archives.



several cabinet members along with their families—no tickets were sold and the public was not invited. The newspaper account goes on to describe (or create) a puzzling part of the reception. President Lincoln asked if Tom registered with the Army. Since he had not, Tom explained that during his first visit to England Barnum introduced him to Queen Victoria as "General Tom Thumb," and the Queen repeated it. Thus, Tom told Lincoln that Queen Victoria bestowed him with the title.

The next day Lavinia had a far more somber encounter with Union soldiers than during the reception. A report from the *Washington Star* in her autobiography told the story: "The next morning we received from the President a pass allowing us to cross the 'Long Bridge,' and a permit to visit the Army Camp on Arlington Heights. About one hundred and fifty thousand soldiers were concentrated there. Regiments were arriving and departing almost hourly. My brother Benjamin's regiment, the Fortieth Massachusetts, had fortunately arrived from the front the evening before, so we had a happy meeting with him; he was granted a furlough for a few days that he might accompany us north. As we rode through the vast camp, we were greeted with cheers, throwing up of caps, and shouts from all sides, such as, 'General, I saw you last down in Maine!' 'I saw you in Boston!' 'I saw you in Pennsylvania!' 'I saw you in old New York!' 'Three cheers for General Tom Thumb and his little wife!' etc.



MR. AND MRS. CHARLES E. STRATTON (GENERAL TOM THUMB AND WIFE).—PHOTOGRAPHED BY HENRY.—[SEE NEXT PAGE.]



It seemed a joy to them to see a face which recalled to their minds memories of happy days at home. It was a grand but a sad sight to me. I reflected how many of those brave fellows would perhaps never again see home, wives, or children, but their bodies now so full of life be lying inanimate on the battle field."

In addition to providing an additional public appearance (the crowd outside the Washington reception allegedly rivaled the one in New York City), the Thumbs' appearance served as a proto-USO experience for the soldiers they met by providing an afternoon of entertainment. The soldiers escaped the ravages of war for a while, but Lavinia turned inward to reflect.

The Thumbs spent a week in Washington, and ultimately returned to public appearances and levees at the American Museum within the following weeks. On February 21, 1863, a wedding portrait of the Thumbs' appeared as the cover of *Harper's Weekly* along with coverage of the event inside the issue. For the most part, the story was compiled from previously published newspaper accounts, but coverage in the magazine secured The Fairy Wedding as a significant cultural event.

For years after the wedding, Minnie Warren and Commodore Nutt joined the Thumbs for levees and the occasional European tour. Several advertisements recalled the wedding day. From 1869-1871, the company embarked on their most famous tour, the three year world tour under the supervision of Barnum's associate Sylvester Bleeker.

European newspapers began to speculate whether the Thumbs' would be able to have children, and the rumors made their way to the U.S. To preserve the idea that both Tom and Lavinia were "perfectly formed" despite their short stature, Barnum staged a photograph featuring Tom and Lavinia with a baby. Lavinia writes in her autobiography that the "Tom Thumb and Family" photograph was a hoax and the couple borrowed an average-sized baby in each new town to show off to the crowds. After a time, the fictional baby would have disrupted the scale of the family picture as it grew, so the ruse was abandoned by telling the press that the baby died suddenly of a fever. This story would be sad but plausible given the high infant mortality rate in the U.S. at the time. This is the only time in Lavinia's autobiographical memoir where she revealed anything about her marriage other than what had already been published in newspapers, pamphlets and advertisements, but offered no further information or reflection. How Lavinia felt about not having children will remain a mystery, but in the photo albums



Numerous photographs were taken of Tom and Lavinia with a baby, sometimes captioned "Tom Thumb and Family," implying that the Strattons were parents. This one probably dates from the late 1860s. Used with permission of from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.



Lavinia also posed alone with a baby as she did in this image taken in London, probably in 1863. Used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.

she left behind, she included some, but not all, carte de visites and photographs sold at her performances. Each of the nine albums currently held at the New York Historical Society contains a carte de visite of the Tom Thumb family or Lavinia holding a baby.

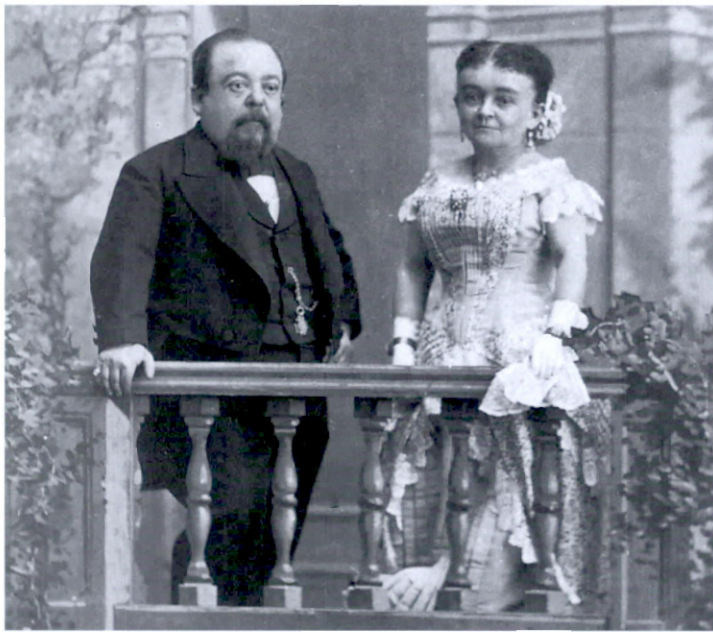
After the three year world tour, the Thumbs continued performing, but maintained a less rigorous touring schedule. Lavinia wrote that Tom began to grow tired of the levees, but her enthusiasm for performing and travel did not cease.

On January 10, 1883 a fire started at the Newhall Hotel in Milwaukee while she, Tom and Bleeker were staying there. The horrific blaze claimed the lives of over ninety people, and Tom never seemed to recover from the trauma. He died suddenly after suffering a stroke on July 18, 1883, and was buried at his parents' plot in the Mountain Grove Cemetery in Bridgeport.

Not much is known about Lavinia between Tom's death and her marriage to dwarf entertainer "Count" Primo Magri. After their marriage, Lavinia continued to perform with Primo and, on occasion, his brother Ernesto. In the off season, Lavinia and Primo lived in Middleborough. They owned and operated Primo's Pastime, an ice cream parlor and snack shop on Summer Street. On promotional flyers, Primo was listed as "Proprietor," and Lavinia as "Clerk." The fall from Queen to Clerk must have stung, so when Lavinia wrote her memoir for the *New York Tribune Sunday Magazine* in 1906, she emphasized the parts of her life her readers would have most likely cared about—her early life, marriage and travels as Mrs. General Tom Thumb. Lavinia threw her own 74<sup>th</sup> birthday levee in Middleborough on October 31, 1915 which featured her performance in the lead role alongside Primo and Ernesto in *Two Strings to Her Bow*, a comedy.<sup>30</sup> Lavinia died of natural causes in Middleborough on November 25, 1919.

I resumed my research on Lavinia just in time to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of the Thumbs. Because it had been so long since my first trip to Bridgeport, I returned to check under the stones I may have left unturned the first time. I wanted to find letters or unpublished documents explaining how Lavinia really felt about her marriage. I was unsatisfied with her autobiography with all its pasted excerpts and adherence to Barnum's script of "the perfect woman in miniature." Of course, I visited Mountain Grove Cemetery again, even though I knew what I would find there. All the while I assumed that the unmarked





*The General and Mrs. Tom Thumb in the early 1880s. Pfening Archives.*

grave was the result of losing her wealth in later life, and that a great injustice was done to Lavinia by not including her name on the headstone. Disappointed and frustrated, I sought the counsel of someone who knew how much the research meant to me. He suggested that perhaps I didn't find what I was looking for because Lavinia left what she wanted to be found. I realized, suddenly, that I was too busy upturning stones to see the answer in front of me.

For Lavinia, "wife" did not mean lost opportunities or a life subsumed by her husband's fame. Becoming a wife was, in her time and place, the only way she could achieve her goal of a performance career. Most readers might have known Tom Thumb at the beginning of this article, but few remember Dolly Dutton. Becoming a wife gave Lavinia access to luxury goods, a home, world travel, and money of her own. She had the power and knowledge to negotiate her own career, and the business savvy to carry it out even if that meant pretending that she didn't. The Fairy Wedding provided the vehicle for her first official act as Mrs. Tom Thumb. Mercy Lavinia Warren Bump Stratton Magri forever remembered her favorite role as the wife of Tom Thumb. BW

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### Endnotes

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4. A. H. Saxon, editor. *The Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb* Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1979), 12.
5. *Middleborough (Massachusetts) Gazette*, January 25, 1862.

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11. *New York Tribune* review of Lavinia's appearance at the American Museum, December 23, 1862.
12. Contract Between P.T. Barnum and Lavinia Warren. December 11, 1862. Uncatalogued, Bridgeport Public Library, Bridgeport, Connecticut.
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15. Lavinia Warren, *op. cit.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Boston (Massachusetts) Atlas*, May 30, 1855.
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19. Lavinia Magri, *op. cit.*
20. "The Loving Lilliputians," *New York (New York) Times*, February 11, 1863.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Sketch of the Life, op. cit.*
23. "A History of Grace Church in New York." <<http://gracechurchnyc.org/home/about/history/>>
24. "The Loving Lilliputians," *op. cit.*
25. *Sketch of the Life, op. cit.*
26. "The Loving Lilliputians," *op. cit.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Sketch of the Life, op. cit.*
29. Lavinia Magri, *op. cit.*
30. Lavinia Magri, "Dedicated to the Richard Warren's Ancestors of the American Revolution in Commemoration of My 74<sup>th</sup> Birthday," October 31, 1915. The Barnum Museum, Bridgeport, Connecticut.



*After Tom Thumb died in 1883, Lavinia married Primo Magri (l.) and performed with him and his brother Ernesto (r.) for years. When this image was taken, they were touring as the Mrs. Tom Thumb Eden Musee Company. Pfening Archives.*



# Clyde Beatty . . . by Dave Price **in Hollywood**

At the crest of his popularity, Clyde Beatty's name was known to virtually every American. I cannot emphasize that point too much, particularly in discussing his early motion pictures, as they were short on substance and primarily showcases for the public to see Beatty working with the big cats.

Clyde Beatty rose to fame during his years with the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus (1925-1934). In the last four of those seasons he appeared at the Ringling-Barnum Madison Square Garden dates, bringing him to the attention of writers from many national publications. In 1932 Beatty collaborated with prominent author Edward Anthony in writing *The Big Cage*, his first book. Anthony had already helped Frank Buck attain international acclaim and he set out to do the same with Beatty. Before the book was off the presses, plans were already underway for a movie of the same name to be produced by Universal Pictures under the guiding hands of Carl Laemmle, Sr. and Jr.

## The Big Cage



Universal Pictures, 1933  
 Presented by Carl Laemmle  
 Produced by Carl Laemmle, Jr.  
 Directed by Kurt Neumann  
 Written by Edward Anthony, Clyde Beatty, Clarence Marks and Ferdinand Reyher



Possibly Clyde Beatty's most recognizable portrait, this great image by Jack Freulich was originally made for *The Big Cage* and has appeared in many places since. Freulich was the head of still photography at Universal Studios, and took almost all the still portraits of the studio's stars before committing suicide in 1936. All illustrations are from the Dave Price Collection.

the movie refers to as the first ever mixing of lions and tigers in one arena.

Although the publicity gave Anita Page second billing (as Roman Ring performer Lillian Langley) and she is shown behind Beatty in the posters, there was no romance between the two; rather she had an on-again-off-again affair with one Russ Penny (Wallace Ford), a washed-up trainer who had lost his nerve.

Two principal characters are circus owner John Whipple (Reginald Barlow) and his banker Henry Cameron (Robert McWade), who was expected to finance Beatty's



Three pictorial themes were followed in the posters for *The Big Cage*. This one shows Beatty as he really appeared. Another poster was similar, but showed Beatty with his shirt half ripped off and his legs longer.



The only time in *The Big Cage* that Beatty wore this style uniform was when he doubled for actor Raymond Hatton.





Clyde Beatty, left, and Raymond Hatton visit on the set of *The Big Cage* just before Beatty doubles for Hatton in the steel arena.



Beatty's down! In a scene from *The Big Cage*, the owner of the circus pulls the unconscious Beatty from the steel arena after he is hit by a falling pedestal. Jimmy O'Hara, played by young Mickey Rooney, at right helps.



*The Big Cage* premiered in England at the Alhambra Theater in Leicester Square, London, with appropriate hullabaloo.

act but had to be convinced.

Comedy relief was provided by Scoops (Andy Devine) and Soupmeat (Vince Barnett), whose jobs consisted of feeding and cleaning up after the big cats. In one scene Scoops brags to Soup about a scraper he has been given which is engraved, "From the Boys of Hagenbeck-Wallace Shows."

Mickey Rooney plays Jimmy, the son of habitually-drunk former trainer Tim O'Hara (Raymond Hatton) who was killed by going in with the tigers late one night. Beatty agrees to let the boy stay with him. We briefly see Jimmy in the arena with a cub lion and a child-size bentwood chair in one scene; apparently he was a trainer-in-training.

The new tigers arrive first and Beatty has to help at the dock when one escapes. When the new lions arrive there is a lot of talk about Nero, a very tough beast who lives up to his reputation by attacking Beatty several times. Of course as we know, Nero was the star lion of Beatty's act at the time; he was featured in the "hypnotic eye" routine and the previous winter had put Beatty in the hospital for a number of weeks with what the press boys called "Jungle Fever."

The final minutes of the picture are quite exciting and include: a storm hitting the big top causing the audience to panic, the chute breaking and releasing several lions, Lillian falling from her Roman Rings, Beatty recapturing the escaped lions, Russ rushing in to pick up Lillian and a man from Madison Square Garden offering Whipple a ton of money for the use of Beatty at the Garden (thereby saving the show). Russ and Lillian kiss and the show ends.

*The Big Cage* had its premier on March 3, 1933, at the Mayfair Theatre in New York, but *Billboard* had said it was to open at the Roxy and Beatty in *Facing the Big Cats*, his last book, says it was originally scheduled to open at Radio City Music Hall. It was a well-received success at the box office.

The files of Milner Library at Illinois State University contain statements regarding the amounts paid Beatty and Anthony for the movie. Made available by Maureen Brunsdale and Steve Gossard, these statements indicate that the contract was dated August 17, 1932 and that as of November 30, 1935, the two had been paid \$20,798.44—not including the substantial wages they were paid during the making of the picture.



Footage of Beatty's act from *The Big Cage* was used in 1943 in *Captive Wild Woman*, and again in 1944 in *The Jungle Woman*, both Universal productions. Beatty was given credit for the scenes in which his footage was used for actor Milburn Stone, who was said to have gotten the part because of his physical resemblance to Beatty.

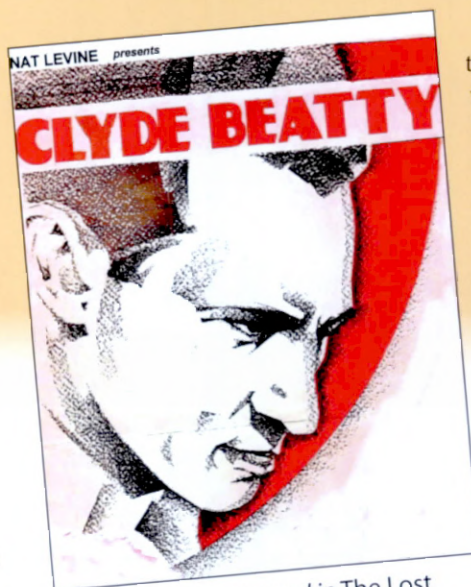
Little Big Books for children were issued utilizing scenes from both *The Big Cage* and *The Lost Jungle*.

## The Lost Jungle



Mascot Pictures, 1934  
Produced by Nat Levine  
Directed by Armand Schaefer and David Howard  
Written by Sherman Lowe and A Martin  
Screenplay by Barney Sarecky and Wyndham Gittens

A year after *The Big Cage*, Nat Levine produced *The Lost Jungle* both as a twelve-chapter serial and a full-length feature. It was not a full-length made by splicing bits and pieces of the serial together. It is obvious that both versions were intended from the beginning as the storyline of the two are different.



Portrait of Beatty used in *The Lost Jungle* publicity.

took place in the cat and wagon barns there. The Hagenbeck-Wallace animals received billing.

The *Lost Jungle* of the title is not in Africa or Asia, but on an island left in the ocean when a land-bridge connecting the two continents sinks into the sea, leaving only a few mountain tops as islands which have species from both continents.

In explaining the title I have gotten ahead of the storyline, but be patient and we'll get back to the *Lost Jungle*, the *Buried City of Kamor*, a

fabulous treasure, dastardly deeds and much more.

Beatty has promised to mix more species than ever before and there is mention of his past success with "twenty lions and twenty



(Left) Nat Levine's 1934 *The Lost Jungle* was released both as a twelve-chapter serial and as a full-length feature. The serial version had a different poster for each chapter. This poster for Chapter Three shows Beatty trapped in a pit with a tiger (but not for long). (Center) Beatty and co-stars Cecelia Parker and Syd Saylor are seen with a chest containing the lost treasure of Kamor, the cause of much intrigue and skullduggery. (Right) This French two-sheet poster reads: *Lost in the Jungle*.

Incidentally John Wayne described Levine as a "Caricature of a Hollywood tycoon."

This production definitely rode on the coattails of the earlier picture. As in *The Big Cage*, the first chapter deals with Beatty breaking an act more dangerous than ever before. This time the owner is a Mr. Maitland (Harry Holman) and the Maitland show winters in Peru, Indiana. Levine used the former American Circus Corporation quarters in the making of the picture and many scenes

tigers," an obvious reference to the previous movie. Beatty debuts his new act and the owner sits and watches but this time he is accompanied by the show's press agent Larry Henderson (Syd Saylor) rather than a banker. Beatty's new act consists of lions, tigers, smaller cats including both black and spotted leopards, and even bears performing in the same arena. In particular the lion Sammy is featured. Beatty's former top lion Nero had been poisoned the spring of 1933 en route back to the Hagenbeck-Wallace show



from the Garden and Sammy was now the lead lion. Of course during rehearsal Sammy and tigress Nellie have a big fight which Clyde is able to break up.

Mickey Rooney plays a small and sometimes uncredited role as a kid hanging around quarters who warns Beatty not to pet his small dog. Some writers have suggested that it was Rooney's appearance in the picture which caused it to be re-issued several times.

There is a former trainer, the bitter, devious and jealous "Sharkey" (Warner Richmond) who tries more than once to double-cross Beatty by stunts such as letting a fresh untrained lion get in to attack Beatty, but Beatty keeps him on the payroll.

After the success of the new act Maitland and Henderson approach Beatty to ask what he has planned for the following year and Beatty says he will personally go to India for new tigers and Africa for new lions. Henderson thinks this is great. In fact, he uses the term "bring 'em back alive" twice and "Greatest Show on Earth" once in his excitement. He encourages Beatty to go by the dirigible *Victory*, a highly publicized airship whose maiden voyage is about to take place.

In the full-length version, Captain Robinson of the *Mary R* (Edward LaSaint) and his lovely daughter Ruth (Cecelia Parker) have already been seen earlier. Beatty is too busy with the act to propose to Ruth so her father insists that she come along



Above, Beatty in the tiger pit from *The Lost Jungle*. A conveniently-placed bentwood chair can be seen at left side of the picture.



Left, a nice three column newspaper ad for *The Lost Jungle*.

on his voyage. They get lost at sea and Beatty sets out to find them. But in the serial version, Beatty does not know Ruth or her father until he reaches the island where they are camped out while awaiting the return of Professor Livingston (Crauford Kent), who had gone in search of treasure in the buried city of Kamor and had not yet returned after some weeks.

In both versions the airship crashes on the island and we are told that lions, tigers, bears and many other beasts live together here because, as "scientists" have stated, Asia and Africa were once connected by a strip of land which

*The Criterion Theatre on Times Square in New York City was highly decorated when *The Lost Jungle* played there in 1934.*





sunk into the ocean leaving only a few mountain tops as islands with animal from both continents including lions, tigers, gorillas, crocodiles and bears. This is illustrated for us by a map showing Asia and Africa connected. The map maker has put Asia west of Africa, a detail typical of Levine's concern for accuracy in his haste to get this picture made.

When the airship crashes, only Beatty, press agent Larry and the devious Sharkey survive and Sharkey lands some distance from the other two. Amazingly, when Beatty awakens on the island the first thing he sees is a lion and a tiger fighting. One is reminded of the story of the blind man who examines a piece of Matzo and demands, "Who writes this crap?"

Robinson's crew is threatening mutiny if he doesn't set sail for home, but the captain insists on one last try to locate Livingston. We are not told where Captain Robinson had rounded up such a worthless crew but their names are: First Mate Kirby (Wheeler Oakman), Flynn (Lou Meehan), Slade (Max Wagner), Sandy (Wally Wales), Pete (Ernie Adams), Thompson (Maston Williams), Jackman (Wes Warner), Al (Charles Whitaker), Steve (Jim Corey) and the nameless cook (Jack Carlyle). It's hard to tell whose side they are on as they switch loyalties from time to time.

Just by pure luck Sharkey has already found the Buried City of Kamor, the weak and probably dying professor, and the fabled Treasure of Kamor. He spends the rest of the movie trying to get at Beatty and to recover the treasure, which he stupidly left right where it would be found.

Beatty, Larry, Ruth and her father then face a series of life threatening situations: purposely freed wild animals, fires, the murder of at least two men, being held captive, the captain's being shot, and having to cross a deep cavern after the footbridge is purposely dislodged. Beatty lands in a pit with a tiger at one point but through sheer hypnotic power forces the beast to lie down. I expected the tiger to go into a roll-over but then I remembered that this is the jungle, not a circus performance. In the end Beatty defeats all the evil doers, saves the treasure (which Captain Robinson has agreed to divide with the crew), traps all the wild animals he needs, captures Starkey (who is put in chains awaiting trial for murder) and proposes to Ruth. The final scene has Larry running from a lion which turns out to be a cub. Laughter and fade.

The chapter titles of *The Lost Jungle* are:

- |                            |                            |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. "Noah's Ark Island"     | 7. "The Tiger's Prey"      |
| 2. "Nature in the Raw"     | 8. "The Lion's Brood"      |
| 3. "The Hypnotic Eye"      | 9. "Eyes of the Jungle"    |
| 4. "The Pit of Crocodiles" | 10. "Human Hyenas"         |
| 5. "Gorilla Warfare"       | 11. "The Gorilla"          |
| 6. "The Battle of Beasts"  | 12. "Take Them Back Alive" |

I said above that Little Big Books were issued based on both Beatty's first two movies. As a kid I called them all Little Big Books, but the one based on *The Big Cage*, published by Whitman, was actually a Big Little Book called *Lions and Tigers* and the two based on *The Lost Jungle* were published by Saalfield and were Little Big Books and were *The Lost Jungle* and *Steel Arena*.

*Billboard* had earlier announced that the title would be *The Lost Continent* and Roger Smith found a reference to it as *The Lost World*. It was released in February of 1934. The picture was later recognized with a diamond-shaped tile on the Studio City Walk of Fame.

## Darkest Africa



Republic Pictures, 1936

Directed by B. Reeves ("Breezy") Eason and Joseph Kane

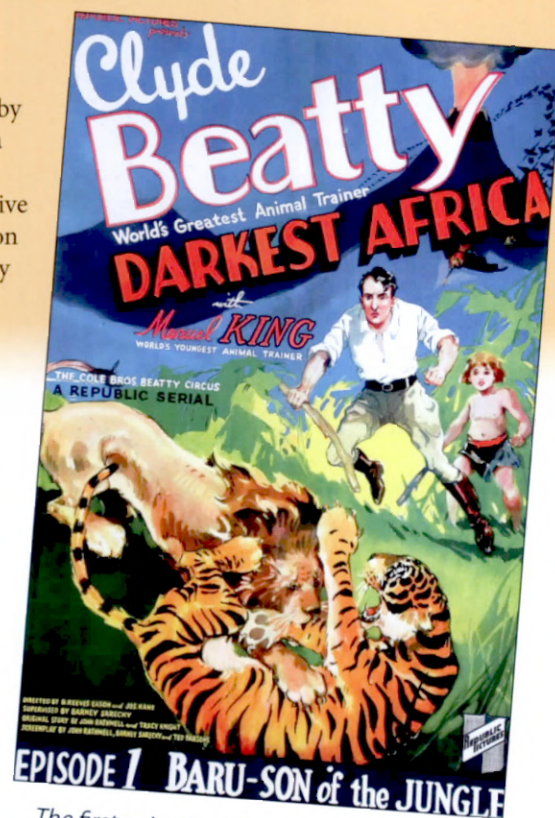
Written by John Rathmell and Tracy Knight

Screenplay by Barney Sarecky and Ted Parsons

By the time this serial was made, Beatty was with the new Cole Bros. Circus and the posters for *Darkest Africa* contained the wording: "With the Cole Bros. Beatty Circus."

This fifteen-episode serial was Republic's first. The studio had been formed in 1935 when a number of independent film-makers merged, among them Mascot and Monogram.

Beatty goes to Africa in search of new animals and right away finds a tiger of all things (Beatty's old mentor Louis Roth had a wrestling tiger that the producers



The first episode of *Darkest Africa* was called "Baru-Son of the Jungle," and refers to the young lion trainer Manuel King, son of Snake King. This poster shows a typical Beatty theme: a fight between a lion and tiger.



"Bat-Men of Joba" was the third of fifteen episodes of *Darkest Africa*. These posters were printed by Morgan Litho in Cleveland and are among the most beautiful used for a Beatty movie. Note mention of Cole Bros.-Beatty Circus on the poster.



Right, I have always wondered if the flying monkeys in *The Wizard of Oz* were inspired by the Bat-Men of Joba in Darkest Africa.

Middle, well into the talkie era, theaters used lantern slides to advertise coming attractions. Here we see a slide for Darkest Africa.

Bottom, Clyde and Harriet Beatty plus friends arrive in Los Angeles on November 23, 1935, to begin shooting Darkest Africa for Republic Pictures.



wanted to work into the picture). Next he finds young Baru the jungle boy (Manuel King) who lives in the jungle and has a pet gorilla Bonga (Ray "Crash" Corrigan). Although many supposed native Africans appear in the picture, there is a lost city right there in the heart of Africa in which a number of Caucasians live. This particular lost city is called both Joba and King Solomon's Sacred City of the Golden Bat. Joba is ruled by the high priest Dagna (Lucien Prival) and is policed and protected by quite convincing flying bat-men who flew in squadrons as well as individually. Baru has an older and beautiful sister Valerie Tramaine (Elaine Shepard). I have no idea why a family would name their little girl Valerie yet come up with Baru the jungle boy for their son.

Valerie is being held captive by Dagna who has palmed her off on the populace of Joba as a living goddess; he believes that the city would be in revolt if she were to leave. Beatty agrees to help Baru in rescuing Valerie and the many adventures he encounters in doing so constitute the episodes of this cliffhanger. His attempts are often foiled by the unscrupulous animal dealers Durkin (Wheeler Oakman) and Craddock (Edmund Cobb) who have spotted a green diamond Baru is wearing and hope to plunder Joba for more jewels.

Beatty has to deal with all the customary trials and tribulations of jungle serials including being tossed in a tiger pit, but instead of making this one lie down he has to wrestle it. Bobby, this tiger, wrestled on a regular basis with Louis Roth's son but he was not familiar with Beatty nor Beatty with him. The scene came off okay, but Beatty didn't go along with Breezy's request for a second take.

In the final scenes Valerie is ordered by Dagna to jump into the sacred volcano and she considers doing it to save her brother and Clyde, but at the last minute her old beloved teacher Gorn (Edward McWade) changes places with her and jumps. Dagna sets Clyde and Baru free and in a final







Above, as near as I can get to a translation of this Swedish *Darkest Africa* poster is *The Wild Animal Selected, whatever that means.*

Below, *King of Jungleland* was the title of the 1948 re-release of *Darkest Africa*.



irony the volcano erupts and destroys the Lost City, making it lost forever. Clyde, Baru and the lovely Valerie have been saved in the nick of time.

Manuel King came from an unusual family. His father William Abraham "Snake" King was one of the fascinating characters in and around the circus business. To get the full story I suggest you read the wonderful *Rattling Yours, Snake King* by his son Bill.

Snake King was the son of Jewish immigrants from Poland. As a kid he joined a carnival and soon was running the snake show. It was difficult to find replacements for his performers as they died off, so he came up with the idea of switching from exhibitor to supplier of snakes to other exhibitors.

He went to the Rio Grande Valley and started a snake supply house out in the sticks from Brownsville. He married a beautiful senorita, raised a wonderful family and built an amazing business known throughout the world. When the baby of the family, young Manuel Morris, began to show an interest in the lion cubs (by this time Snake was dealing in far more than snakes), his father came up with the idea of developing him into the "World's Youngest Lion Trainer."

In coming months both Chubby Guilfoyle and later Bobby MacPherson (incidentally both were mentors of Clyde Beatty) worked not only with the lions Snake bought, but with Manuel in teaching him the rudiments of handling an act of ten African lions. Within months Manuel was playing fairs around the country and was featured at the Million Dollar Pier in Atlantic City when he was tagged to appear with Beatty in *Darkest Africa*. He later appeared with the James M. Cole Circus.

## Cat College

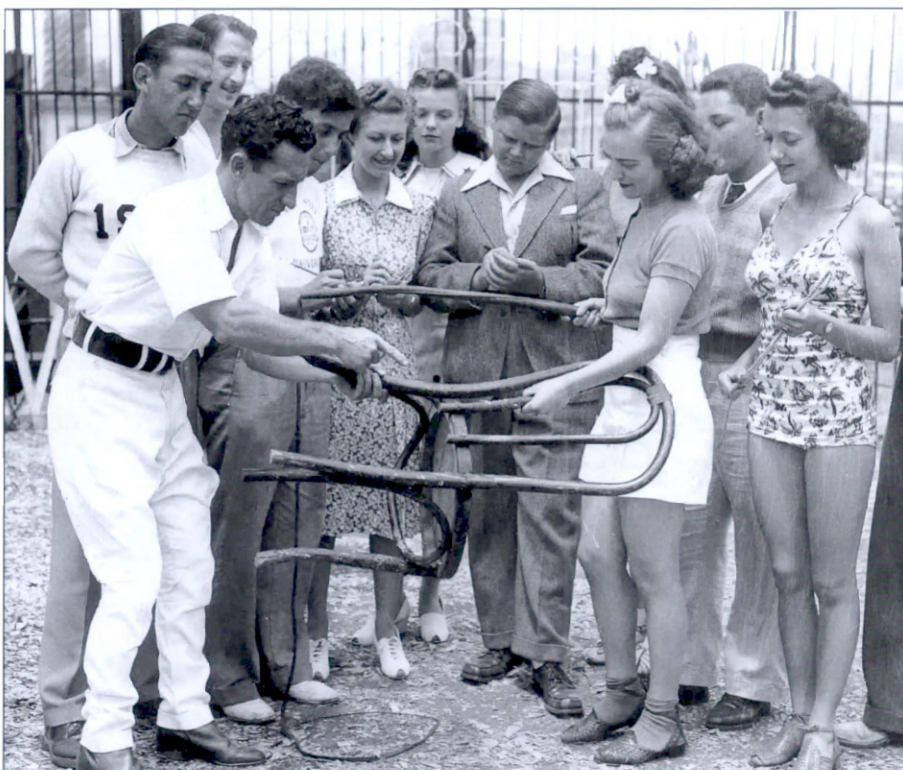


MGM, 1940

Pete Smith Specialty #56

Produced by Jack Chertok and Richard Gladstone

Directed by Joe Newman



During his appearance at Atlantic City's Million Dollar Pier in 1939, Beatty conducted a school for aspiring lion trainers. Pat English, his star pupil, continued her education at Beatty's Jungle Zoo in Fort Lauderdale later that year where her training was the subject of a Pete Smith special called *Cat College*. English must be the young lady in the back row whose face is hidden in this publicity photo from the Atlantic City engagement.



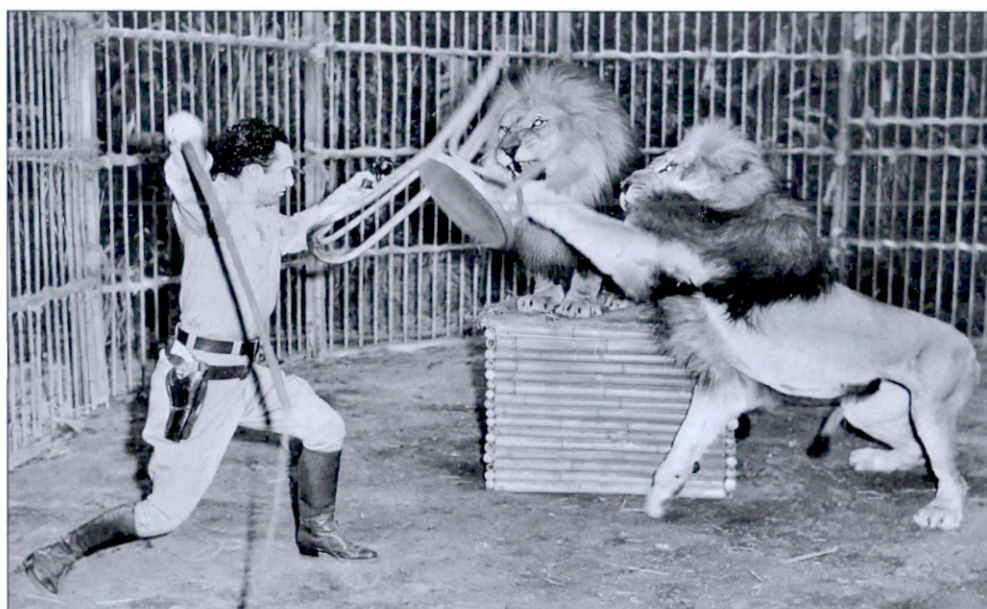


*Cat College was shot at Beatty's Jungle Zoo in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. It premiered at the Florida Theater in downtown Fort Lauderdale in June 1940. The theater's interior was said to be decorated with props sent from the *Gone with the Wind* premier in Atlanta the previous December.*

In the fall of 1939 Clyde Beatty opened his Jungle Zoo in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He had played the Million Dollar Pier in Atlantic City all that summer and had gotten some publicity while there by conducting a school for young wannabe lion trainers. This was continued in Fort Lauderdale and his star pupil was a young girl from Bayside, Long Island, New York, named Patricia English. This ten-minute short subject deals with her training and is narrated by the inimitable voice of Pete Smith, a successful short subject producer of the day. CHS member Chuck Sprague believed the short was made in October of 1939, but was not released until June of 1940.

Patricia is shown taking her lessons seriously until the day of her final exam when she freezes in the big cage by herself facing a big lion. Fortunately she grits her pretty white teeth and makes the lion sit up, thereby passing her final exam.

*Cat College* is seen on television from time to time and VHS copies are available.



*Beatty and a couple of lions mix it up in a publicity still from *Africa Screams*, 1949.*

## Africa Screams



Nassour Studios, 1949  
Released by United Artists  
Produced by Huntington Hartford and Edward Nassour  
Directed by Charles Barton  
Written by Earl Baldwin

This typical Abbott and Costello comedy was one of their first independent films made while they were still under contract to Universal. They loaded the cast with recognizable professionals like Clyde Beatty and Frank Buck (as themselves), and Max and Buddy Baer (as Grappler McCoy and Boots Wilson). Beatty is listed first of these in the credits.

For good measure, a couple of the several Stooges were included: Shemp Howard as the nearsighted hunter Gunner and Joe Bessar as Harry the butler. This was the only picture in which these two Stooges worked together, their tenures with the famous trio not overlapping.

Diana Emerson (Hillary Brooke) has planned a safari to Africa and Bud Abbott (as Buzz Johnson) manages to talk their way into





Beatty and Lou Costello in a publicity photo from *Africa Screams*.

the company with the claim that Lou Costello (as Stanley Livingston [sic], not Livingston as one might assume.) is a great explorer and knows the area they plan to visit like the back of his hand.

There is a very funny scene between Costello and Beatty: When the two meet at the Emerson mansion, Costello proceeds to tell Beatty that he is an old lion-hunting buddy of Clyde Beatty's, that Beatty is a phony, and that in fact he had trained Beatty's cats for him. When he gets around to introductions and he realizes to whom he is talking, he stammers and is unable to speak. Abbott walks in and tells Costello, "Tell him about the time you and Clyde Beatty were hunting tigers in India." Finally Costello manages to say, "Mr. Beatty, I'm sorry for what I said about Mr. Beatty."

Throughout the movie Beatty is pronounced "Bee-tee," even by Beatty himself, who pronounced it "Bay-tee." My thought is that some scenes had already been shot using that pronunciation prior to Beatty's arrival on the set and that he was asked to go along rather than have to re-shoot those scenes.

This unlikely entourage sets off and along the way the two comics discover that the purpose of the safari is to find diamonds. Of course when they get to Africa they are unable to give any assistance to the party and they stumble and bumble their way into captivity by a native tribe, the chief of whom thinks Stanley would be a tasty treat. A big gorilla (Charles Gamora) frightens off the cannibals and Stanley ends up with the diamonds that were paid for his brisket, so to speak. In the end Stanley owns the department store where he and Buzz started off, and Buzz is given an elevator operator's job. Oh, and the gorilla has come along as Stanley's partner.

The film was shot late in 1948 after the Beatty show was safely tucked away in quarters at El Monte, California. Brooke and Bessar later joined Abbott and Costello's stock company for more productions. There is a story that Lou Costello went around throwing pies in the faces of other cast members during shooting, but never pulled the gag on Bay-tee.

## Perils of the Jungle



Commodore Productions, 1953  
Distributed by Lippert Pictures  
Produced by Walter White, Jr.  
Directed by George Blair  
Written by Robert T. Smith  
Screenplay Frank Hart Taussig

Commodore was the same outfit that produced the Clyde Beatty Radio show and the one issue of Clyde Beatty Comics. Walter White, Jr., Frank Taussig and Robert Smith were old Commodore stalwarts. Most of their work was in the "B" grade and this picture was panned unmercifully for good reason.

The story is told through a series of unconvincing flashbacks and comes off as disjointed. Famed explorer Grantland Cunningham (Stanley Farrar) plans to capture the "last known" Nubian Lions in order to save them from extinction and engages Beatty to accompany him. Trapper/dealer Jo Carter (Phyllis Coates) has some



Commodore Productions released *Perils of the Jungle* starring Beatty in 1953. Commodore also produced the Beatty radio show. Beatty was already on the road with his Clyde Beatty Circus when shooting began and he flew back for his takes while Joe Arcaris worked his act on the show.



that they can buy, but a suspicious fire wipes them out.

Evil hunter/dealer Gorman (John Doucette) opposes them at every turn, but is himself nearly killed by a man in a gorilla suit. Beatty saves him and Gorman then agrees to help in the search for lions. Unfortunately they search in the deep jungles instead of the savannahs where the lions live.

Grant is bitten by a tsetse fly and Beatty seeks medical help. The trek leads them into the territory of very unfriendly natives (the infamous Matabeles), who are led by an evil white guy Grubbs (Leonard Mudie) and only by using the tribe's boy king (Shelby Bacon) as a hostage are they able to escape. After all this Beatty and Grant are still determined to return to Africa for more adventures as soon as possible.

*Perils of the Jungle* was released March 20, 1953 and re-released years later.

## Ring of Fear



Warner Brothers, 1954  
Produced by Robert Fellows and John Wayne (uncredited)  
Directed by James Edward Grant  
Original Screenplay by Paul Fix and Philip MacDonald  
CinemaScope and WarnerColor

*Ring of Fear* was Beatty's last and probably best movie. It has beautiful shots of the show and of Beatty's act, and a host of good actors plus Mickey Spillane, then at the top of mystery writers. Unfortunately the storyline received some unfavorable reviews. It is widely available today on DVD and will be watched by Spillane and circus fans for years to come.

The story begins with the escape from a mental institution of Dublin O'Malley (Sean McClory), a former announcer and performance director of Beatty's circus and a deranged killer. O'Malley harbors a deep resentment over Beatty's imagined ridicule when he was run out of the arena by a big lion several years back. He soon rejoins the show, is hired in his old spot and at once instigates various problems for Beatty. Clyde soon asks his friend Mickey Spillane to join the show and help solve the mystery as the show seems to be jinxed. Pat O'Brien plays Frank Wallace, the lovable but somewhat cantankerous manager of the show; some claimed at the time that his role was based on Frank Orman.

Trapeze performers Armand and Valerie St. Dennis (John Bromfield and Marian Carr) have a small daughter Suzette (Kathy Cline) and O'Malley loses no time in suggesting that the child may be his. Valerie pleads with him to keep his thoughts to himself.

Comedy is provided by Pedro (Ramiro) Gonzalez-Gonzalez whom much of America had first seen when he appeared as a contestant on the Groucho Marx television show *You Bet Your Life*. Emmett Lynn plays Twitchy, a clown whom O'Malley knew in the old days and whom he is able to blackmail into assisting him in his evil deeds



A colorized shot of Beatty and his famous tiger Saber appears on this Italian poster for *Ring of Fear*. The translation reads: Circus of Wonders.

around the show. As an example, in one scene Beatty has a new tiger in the practice arena on a lunge line which breaks due to Twitchy's having soaked a section in acid. Twitchy feels a lot of loyalty to Beatty from years back, so decides to tell all, but O'Malley kills him to prevent this.

As O'Malley falls under suspicion he releases a tiger as a diversion. Beatty works the tiger into a nearby boxcar in which O'Malley unfortunately has hidden and so ends Dublin O'Malley



Actor Pat O'Brien and Beatty in a publicity shot from *Ring of Fear*. The men remained good friends, so much so that Beatty's widow Jane asked O'Brien to deliver the eulogy at her husband's funeral in 1965.



and the jinx to the show.

The principal writer Paul Fix will be remembered from his role as Marshal Micah Torrance on ABC's *The Rifleman*. The original title was announced as *Man Killer*.

Beatty remained friends with several people from this picture and Pat O'Brien gave the eulogy at Beatty's funeral while Bob Fellows was an active pall bearer. Much of the movie was shot in Phoenix and *Billboard* reported that "token" filming ended in Memphis during the 1953 stand. I saw the show in Nashville the previous week and recall a cameraman shooting directly into Beatty's arena during his act. The George Hanneford, Sr. family and the Walllendas are among the circus performers whose acts are shown.



## 3 Ring Circus

Paramount Pictures, 1954  
Produced by Hal B. Wallis  
Directed by Joseph Pevney  
Screenplay by Don McGuire

This Martin and Lewis comedy was shot in VistaVision (their second such production) on the Clyde Beatty Circus, although the equipment was lettered "Clyde Brent Circus." The cast includes Joanne Dru as the owner of the show, Zsa Zsa Gabor as the star aerialist and Wallace Ford as the manager. There was a cameo appearance by Elsa Lanchester, previously the bride of Frankenstein and later Aunt Clara on *Bewitched*, as the bearded lady in the sideshow. The movie was filmed early in the year when the paint on the wagons was fresh and the canvas new, but it was not released until Christmas day. The plot was rather weak and relied on standard clichés for both laughs and pathos. Jerry was involved in hackneyed comedic routines in the wild animal arena, as a human

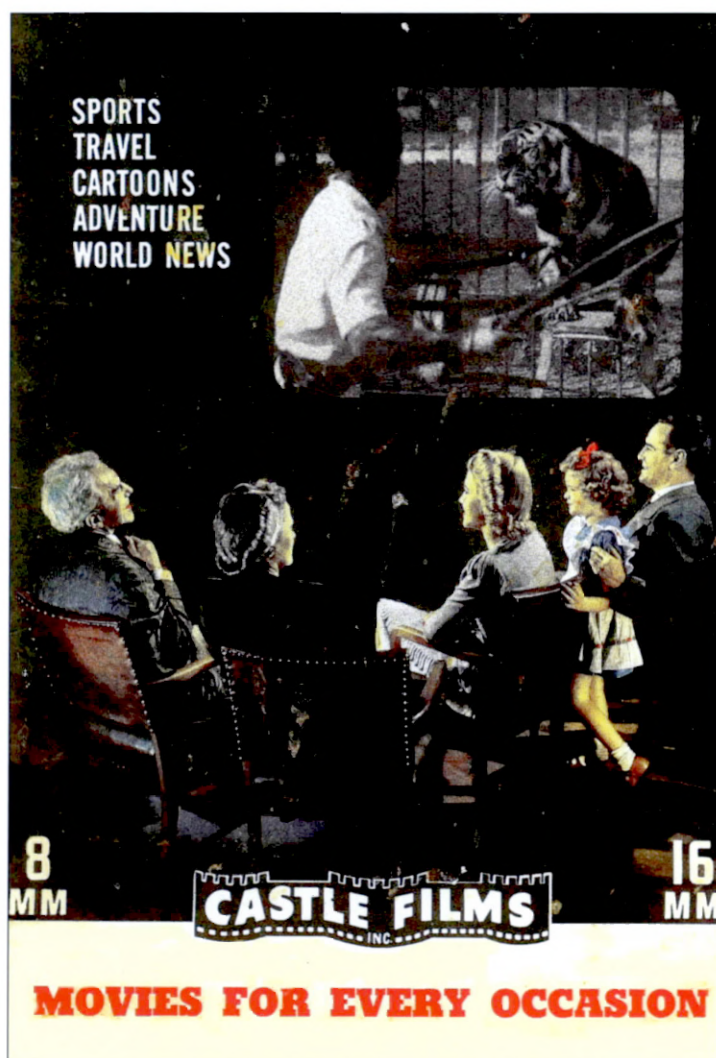


Paramount's Martin and Lewis comedy *3 Ring Circus*, released in 1954, featured the Clyde Beatty Circus, but not Clyde Beatty. The wagons were all lettered "Clyde Brent Circus." Later re-released as *Jerrico the Wonder Clown*, this image shows, l. to r., Zsa Zsa Gabor, Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis, and Joanne Dru as well as a good view of the Beatty big top interior.

cannonball and finally making a sad little crippled child laugh, which of course brought Jerry to tears. It is said that *3 Ring Circus* was made during the worst of the bickering that eventually resulted in the team's breakup. The picture has the advantage to the circus-minded of showing some great views of the Beatty rail show. It was re-released in 1978 as *Jerrico The Wonder Clown*.

Clyde Beatty never claimed to be a great actor, but he was for my generation "Mister Circus," a sentiment once expressed to me by Tommy Hanneford. He may not have been so acclaimed by the public today because of the animal rights activists and their often mistaken notions, but in his day he was the man. Buckles Woodcock recalls his dad saying, "I always thought that Mr. Beatty's greatest legacy was that for whatever the reason, he represented to the public of his day the American circus, and he handled that position with character and dignity." BW

Dave Price first saw Clyde Beatty perform in 1943. He began collecting Beattyana in 1953 when he asked a store owner for a Clyde Beatty Circus poster in his window after the show left town. He was a billposter on a number of circuses, including Beatty-Cole from 1960 to 1963 where he got to know Beatty personally.



Castle Films issued several "home movies," which featured Clyde Beatty. They were apparently quite popular, so much so that his photograph appeared on the cover of Castle's catalog one year. This shot is from Castle's *Wild Animal Thrills* filmed at Beatty's Jungle Zoo in Fort Lauderdale.



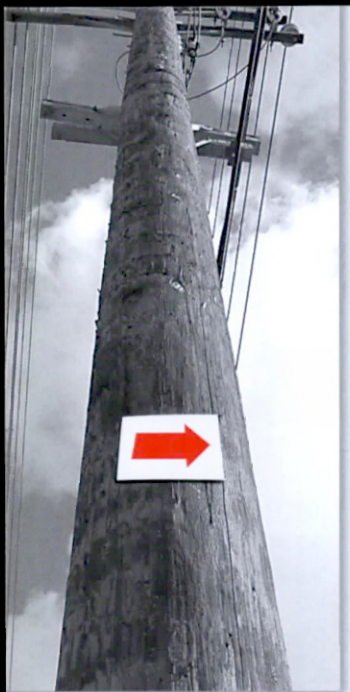
THANKS FOR A STUPENDOUS SUMMER  
AND BEST WISHES FOR A  
WONDERFUL HOLIDAY SEASON FROM  
**CIRCUS WORLD!**



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# Notes on Circuses I Have Seen

by Tom Parkinson

*The following is the earliest known commentary on the circus by Tom Parkinson, one of the best field show historians. He began his observations while a high school student in Decatur, Illinois. He continued through his undergraduate years at Millikin College and the University of Illinois, ending when he entered the army in 1943. The original typescript for this article is in the Tom Parkinson papers at Circus World Museum.*

## Seils-Sterling Circus, Decatur, Illinois, May 1, 1937

Fair crowd and fairly good show. Two elephants, spec *Cinderella in Jungleland*, featured Kit Carson, Jr. Came from Springfield. Stayed on lot and left early Sunday morning. After delivering my papers, I watched them leave. Mud necessitated elephants and men on each truck and car as it left. All left in long line about 6:00 a.m.

## Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, Decatur Illinois, June 16, 1937

Waited at crossing east of the lake to see train come in from Lafayette, Indiana. It came just after we left and we saw it cross the bridge. At runs on N. Water saw beginning of unloading. Man got eye gauged out by broken hook. Made long walk to lot. Late arrival and rain of previous week as well as drizzle that day made it necessary to cancel both shows at 2:00 p.m. when the Big Top was not yet up. Men at one end of menagerie were putting up while men at other were taking down just after order was given to pack up for St. Louis. Had Terrell Jacobs, Hoot Gibson, Hannefords.

## Ringling Bros Barnum & Bailey Circus, & Bailey Circus, Bloomington, Illinois, August 24, 1937

[Brother] Bob and I went up on interurban. Saw lead stock unloaded and saw fourth section arrive including the new hospital car. Show was fine and the crowd a large one. We talked with a midget clown in back yard when he saw we had bought some route cards. Bob had been on the lot of this show in St. Louis the Sunday before this Tuesday.

## Tom Mix Circus, Decatur, Illinois, September 23, 1937

The night before, Bob had appendicitis and couldn't go. I saw the trucks come in from Danville before going to school. Saw night show which included Mix, Arbaughs, Kinko, George Hannefords and Hobsons. Show was mediocre and slow due to very poor audience. Weather was too cold. Went to Springfield.

## Col. Tim McCoy Wild West Quarters, Springfield, Illinois, April 10, 1938

Went over with Bob and Mother. At Fair Grounds we saw several of the wagons and a lot of poles and stakes and seat parts. Also

some horses. The day before most of the show had gone to Chicago for indoor opening. Two stock cars were the only railroad cars there at that time.

## Hagenbeck-Wallace Advance Car, Decatur, Illinois, April 11, 1938

Bob and I went down about 4:30 and found it in the Wabash yards.



*Hagenbeck-Wallace advance car in 1938. Blacaman, the show's star, is shown hypnotizing lions on the side of the car. Pfening Archives.*

## Col. Tim McCoy Wild West Show, Decatur, Illinois, April 24, 1938

While riding around south of town after delivering papers, I accidentally saw fifteen cars of this show going from Springfield to Columbus to open under-canvas season. Followed it about 25 miles.



*Tim McCoy Wild West baggage wagons on flat ready to leave Springfield, Illinois for show's opening outdoor stand at Columbus, Ohio on April 25, 1938. Pfening Archives.*



## Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, Decatur, Illinois, April 25, 1938

I waited a long time for train at the runs. I was dismissed for part of school, but had to go back. At 11:30 from the window in physics class, I saw the bright orange train come in from Evansville, Indiana. I then went to the Hotel Orlando to get Art Borella, famous clown, and brought him back to school. There he gave a talk (very good) in the auditorium and two in individual classes. After this I took him to the lot and we had breakfast together in the cook-house. Had a big plate of bacon and eggs and coffee (the first time I liked it).

Then a huge Negro said I needed more and brought another big plate. Borella and I had a nice long talk about circus history, fans



*Hagenbeck-Wallace sledge gang hammering stake at Decatur, Illinois, April 25, 1938. Pfening Archives.*

and business. He was surprised at the history, etc. that I knew. He then introduced me to about six other clowns including Roy "Bobo" Barnett. Also looked up Eddie Hendricks who Charlie Campbell asked me to see. Hendricks was in Poodles Hanneford's act. After this we went to the dressing tent and clown alley. Here we saw the clowns and also a few other actors loafing before the performance. Later the clowns all began to put their make-up on. Borella and Barnett helped a new-comer put his on. Borella had two fill-in clowns working for him and they had a little chicken tied to a trunk, which they used in an act.

Had a big time here. When the big show started, I stayed with the joeys and watched from the backdoor. Saw Blacaman, Mickey King, and the Jim Wong Troupe which was warming-up before going in. This show being late, wasn't over until about 4:30. Went to evening show and enjoyed it immensely, especially the clown acts.

Saw the Big Top go down and then went to runs. To bed at 1:30 a.m. after Dad came down to the runs after us. Best circus day yet! Poor afternoon show and fine evening crowd. Good show.

## Al G. Barnes-Sells Floto with Ringling-Barnum, Advance Car, Decatur, Illinois, July 14, 1938

Saw ad and article in the paper and went down to see the car. It was Ringling's No.2 Car. Talked with manager. Asked about Eddie Jackson. Also saw the five trucks with it.

Friday, July 15. Hunted up a bill posting truck and followed it to about five places. Talked a lot with the two men about the bad business, etc. They gave up two fine four-sheets. Fine fellows.

Saturday, July 16. Saw our friends of yesterday putting up some banners downtown. Also looked for other banners and billboards.

Billboards are swell. This show really means business. No other crew ever used so much paper or any billboards here. Must be due to the fact that only eight days between announcement and date.

## Cole Bros Circus, Advance Car, Decatur, Illinois, July 19, 1938

While looking over the yards for the second Barnes-Sells Floto car I saw Cole Bros. Car No. 1. I got all excited and got Bob. We came back, talked to a glue-mixer who said the show was not coming here (although it was to come here July 26<sup>th</sup> until Barnes-S-F beat it, according to the woman who owns the show grounds). The rest of the crew was in Mattoon [Illinois] and was going to Bloomington next. Big let-down, but we plan to go to Bloomington.

## AL. G. Barnes-Sells Floto Circus with Ringling-Barnum Features, Decatur, Illinois, July 22, 1938

Got up at 4:00 a.m. and went out to Mt. Pulaski. From there we followed the first section in to town. Used both Barnes and Ringling cars and wagons.



*Nice stand of paper in Baraboo, Wisconsin for the Barnes-Floto Circus with Ringling-Barnum features for engagement in nearby Madison, August 2, 1938. Burt Wilson albums, Pfening Archives.*



We watched the first wagons go down the runs and then went to the lot. Show used new layout here. Witnessed the erecting of the tents. They used open corral type of menagerie (no top). We saw the matinee which lasted for three hours and 10 minutes. A real all-star show! Returned shortly after the night show started and watched several wagons leave. Then watched Gargantua for about two hours. He really lives up to all the press agent's stories. The performers even still stand and watch him for long times. Saw Frank Buck, John Ringling North, Henry Ringling North, and George Smith. Half-house in afternoon, three-fourths at night. A really swell show!

### **Cole Bros. Circus, Bloomington, Illinois, August 3, 1938**

Bob and I got up at 4:00 a.m. and started for Bloomington. In the Clinton yards we saw the Cole Bros. train and followed it into Bloomington. In the Bloomington yards we saw the first wagon unloaded and saw a lot of horses unloaded, too. Saw first wagons on the lot. Soon heard a parade was scheduled and saw several fine tableaux (Asia, America, Columbia, Hippo (or India) and two with no names. Parade this year was not a regular feature, but just started the day before in Mattoon. However both parades were cancelled. Show used lots of horses with several eight-horse hitches. Saw the matinee and really enjoyed it. Sat beside the band and what a time they had! They hid a new man's flute; the calliope player hooked an electric shaver to the line for calliope and shaved before the show began. They all had Cokes and would stop playing any time they wished to walk around or to drink the Coke. Vic Robbins, leader, is a fine fellow. Looks like he just told a joke. Always laughing. Fine band and show. About a three-quarter house. After show we saw the cook-house taken down. Taking one of the dining wagons off the lot, a teamster broke the pole on the wagon. A huge Negro

roustabout razzed him with, "Well, he's from the Mighty Haag!" At the runs we saw the first wagons loaded and started home. At Randolph, Illinois, we stopped to get some lithos and heralds. We got 57 heralds! Home at 7:40. Swell day.

Thursday, August 4. Saw in the paper where Cole Bros. returned to winter quarters after the Bloomington stand. Only high officials knew of closing until they [showfolks] awoke on the way to Rochester, [Indiana winter quarters].

### **Barnett Bros. Circus, Advance Car, Decatur, Illinois July 3, 1939**

Saw Barnett ad and in town found nice looking advance truck. Taking photos of it two men thought I was a newspaper photographer. When told I was a fan they mentioned Harry Chipman [fan-friendly advance man] but he wasn't there. These two gave me a press book.



*Canvas being unloaded from Barnett Bros. semi-trailer at Kokomo, Indiana, June 30, 1939. Pfening Archives.*



*Cole Bros. midway, location unknown, 1938. Note sideshow banner line on right and concession stand on left. Pfening Archives.*

### **Barnett Bros. Circus, Decatur, Illinois, July 10, 1939**

Arrived on lot at 6:30 a.m. and found cook house up and trucks parked on lot. Had a long talk with Mrs. Bert Backstein [wife of circus fan and model builder Bert Backstein]. At 9:30 a.m. found Bill Woodcock, circus fan, elephant man, and kid-show barker. He showed me his circus items and his wife showed me her family (Orton) album. Then he came to our house to see our collection. Back at lot I ate with him in cook house. Heard performer talking about an ex-trouper who lives in Bloomington and who was hurt in the Hagenbeck-Wallace 1918 wreck. Woodcock let us into side show free and then we saw the matinee. Especially enjoyed the acts of the Woodcocks. Lee Powell, the "Lone Ranger" was feature and he held about 50% of the house for his concert. A half and a three-quarter house. Show is fine but could be faster. Came from Champaign and went to Lincoln.



**Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey,  
Chicago, July 29, 1939**

Didn't see the show but walked around the lot. Saw air-conditioning units and Terrell Jacobs' cages lined up in backyard. Got programs and route cards. Big Top was south of Soldier Field and cookhouse was in the Soldier Field building.

**Cole Bros Circus,  
Bloomington, Illinois, August 21, 1939**

Arrived at runs about 6:00 a.m. Found three of the eight flats already unloaded. Watched erection and preparation for parade. Had these wagons: United States, Great Britain, Belgium, Hippo or India all white with gold scrolls, old B&B one-sided cage, converted tab 74, a tab with title of show in oval on side, two clown carts, air calliope, steam calliope (new, this season—not the one used in 1935-6-7). Also a commissary wagon was tab with title in oval on side, but it didn't parade. Cold and cloudy till noon and then nice. Nice crowd for parade. Small crowd for matinee. Used much equipment from Robbins 1938 show including tabs, tents including Big Top, etc. Otto Griebing fine. Show ok, but didn't have Loyal-Repenskys, Art Mix, or Gretonas as advertised. Show carried eight flats, five stocks, six coaches, two trucks, twelve bulls, three camels, two zebras, sacred cow, one llama, three big cages, and five cross cages. We left at 4:30 to get some lithos. Show was 1 hour, 45 minutes long. Lots of fine eight, six, and four horse teams. Parade had lots of color, plumes, balloon men, etc., but people in it could have had much more pep. Runs right beside the lot. Prices: 75¢ and 40¢ with the reserves at 75¢ and 50¢. Concert 25¢. Side show, first 25¢ and later 15¢.

**Peru, Indiana, Quarters, September 2, 1939**

On way to short trip to Canada, we visited Peru quarters. At edge of town a sign tells of the quarters. Saw Wallace Theater, Circus Tavern, etc. S.E. of town on way to quarters saw a pillar with "Wallace" on it. All gates on way are of carved wood and painted orange. At quarters, saw animal barns, storage barns, shops, etc. and two wagon sheds. One (largest) had mostly baggage wagons and a few cages. Other one had a few tableaux, ticket-wagons, cages, and baggage wagons. Saw wagons with these titles on them: Hagenbeck-Wallace, Sells Floto, John Robinson, Al G. Barnes, Sells Floto &

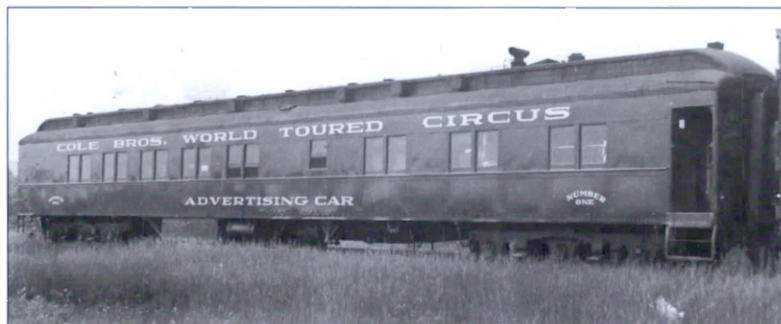


*Abandoned American Circus Corporation wagons at Peru, Indiana, September 2, 1939. Calliope wagon on right originally on Gentry Bros. Tom Parkinson photo, Pfening Archives.*

John Robinson 10 Big Shows, and Al G. Barnes-Sells Floto. Saw old Forepaugh bandwagon, fine carved ticket-wagon formerly on H-W, SE, JR, Two camels and one pony are only animals. No activity. Also saw old Carl Hagenbeck Lion tableau.

**Cole Bros Circus, Advance Car,  
Decatur, Illinois, April 27, 1940**

Bob called up and said the town was billed so I went down to the yards and found the car. While standing around, began conversation with a banner-squarer and then later saw him again uptown at work. Show did OK job. A carnival had already billed the town, but the circus wasn't bothered. First time Cole came to Decatur.



*Cole Bros. Circus advance car, location unknown, 1940. Frank Norton photo, Pfening Archives.*

**Russell Bros Circus, Danville, Illinois, May 5, 1940**

We took Mother to Champaign and then went on to Danville. Saw the green Big Top from some distance. We got there while the afternoon show was on and as we had to leave about 4:30, we didn't see performance. All trucks were well painted and the Big Top looked swell (green). However the midway was rather tacky. Needed a new midway marquee and snappier side show manager. Music sounded fine. Was unable to see any cages though understand they had some fine ones. Show had played Lincoln, Bloomington, Clinton, Champaign, Paris, Danville.

**Cole Bros. Circus, Decatur, Illinois, May 12, 1940**

Went to DeMolay breakfast and then went out to meet the train. Got on the wrong road and just by coincidence, saw the train going over a trestle. It really looked fine with all fresh paint and



*Cole Bros. cages waiting to be hauled to the lot, Decatur, Illinois, May 12, 1940. Tom Parkinson photo, Pfening Archives.*



very circusy equipment throughout. It carried eleven flats, six stocks, seven coaches, one bill car, twelve cages (including an old H-W seal den and H-W hippo den to replace fire loss), Columbia, America (just then made into a calliope), Old 101 tab, Mother Goose, Woman in Shoe, three Macks, around 60 draft horses. Show was late (9:30) and show didn't start until 3:30. Had about a half house in afternoon and little over half at night. Featured Ken Maynard, Loyal-Repenskeys, Escalantes, and a roller skating act in Big Show. Talked with Harold Hall, clown from Springfield, and, P. G. Lowery, kid show band leader.

Saw Adkins and Terrell on lot all day. Show was two hours and OK, but needed something for more interest—maybe an animal act. Watched unloading with Backstein and then watched erection. At night, watched tear-down and loading. No parade was carried, but, employees think one will be given soon. Also say that they aren't going back to Rochester. All equipment, especially cages, looked extra fine.

### Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, St. Louis, September 8, 1940

Whole family drove to St. Louis in the morning, arriving at the circus lot about 11:00 a.m. Bob and I then looked over the lot until show time. Saw the blue tent, air-coolers, tractors, etc. Equipment needed paint. I took my first movies as well as some still photos. Train was right next to the lot. At 1:30 we were joined again by Mom and Dad and we all went to the show. In menagerie we saw Gargantua again. Also Lotus, the Barnes hippo. Horse fair was there, but we skipped it to get to our seats. The show had a full house if not a turn-away. *Return of Marco Polo* spec was wonderful—most beautifully costumed I have seen. Every act was a big feature and certainly pleased the audience. Many beautiful thoroughbred horses were evident throughout the show. One act consisted of several types of buggies and coaches drawn by fine horses. Alfred Court's act was marvelous—perhaps the best I have seen—used all three rings at once. Saw the leaps for the first time, I think. Also had Christianis (sic), Concellos, Yacopis, etc. to make a full three hour show. Everyone was very pleased with the performance. Costumes were especially good and well kept. I heard some complaint about the "blues" and about the attitude of the ushers



*Ringling-Barnum stringer wagon ready to go down runs, Philadelphia, May 19, 1940. Bob Good photo, Pfening Archives.*

and candy butchers. The heat at first was terrible but the air-coolers gradually brought it down to a comfortable temperature. After the show, we watched them start the tear-down (cookhouse) and then left for home. We all agreed that we had seen a marvelous show.

### Kay Bros. Circus, Taylorville, Illinois, May 7, 1941

This was the opening day of this show's 1941 season. I went down in time to get there about 1:30. Show was up and side show and pit show were open. Show had big top, side show, pit show, and one other one; all were small. Used about 10 trucks.

Was rather disappointed in the whole thing after once around the lot. But bought my ticket and went in. No menagerie. Show began. Had air-calliope for music. Had ring, arena, and two stages. Gave a really good show that pleased everyone. Had big stars as Art Mix,



*Clown routine on Kay Bros. Circus, opening day, May 7, 1941, Taylorville, Illinois. Tom Parkinson photo, Pfening Archives.*

Harold Barnes, Si Kitchie, Guice Troupe, and others. Three clowns, one bull, eight horses, two lions. Lion act by [Dick] Clemens was very well done. Admission 40 cents and 20 cents. Crowd of about 200-300, mostly kids. Show was good and I came away with a





*Ringling-Barnum unloading, location unknown, 1941. Burt Wilson albums, Pfening Archives.*

high opinion of the whole outfit. It claimed 54 animals for a total including monkeys, etc., which were in kid show. Went home after the show which lasted about 1½ hours.

### **Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, St. Louis, June 12, 1941**

Bob and I went to the lot after taking Mother and Mrs. Broughton downtown. Arrived on lot about 10:00 a.m., expecting to be very late. But found that the train was just in and we saw the first string of wagons on way to lot. Lot was at Kingshighway and Southwestern as usual, but this year they used the part of it on the north side of tracks as well as the south side. Cookhouse on north side. After watching the unloading a few minutes, we came back to the lot where we stayed all day. Show had been in rain the day before and wagons were muddy—tents were still wet. We heard very much talk on the lot about how they had been late all season, got later every day, should advertise afternoon show for a later hour, should reduce load and size of props, etc. Whole process was about four hours late. At noon the Big Top was still on the ground. Using trucks and tractors 100% of course, the show was finally unloaded about 1:30. Crew was still having trouble with the pole-less gorilla tent, taking a long time to get it up and having trouble raising two of the poles even. It is blue. Menagerie is red with blue sides. Big Top blue with red sides. Horse Fair is red

with red and white sidewalls. Sideshow is a yellow top. Banners are of usually wagon-side variety, but are done in a more modernistic type of painting. Six tall orange towers, huge bulky things, are used to put between the banners. These did not serve any purpose other than decoration and to hold some canvas banners higher. Banner line is too modernistic to be adaptable to a traveling outfit. Looks banged up and too plain. Horse Fair is filled with many fine horses. This year included were ten draft horses used in spec—each in an individual stall. Gorilla top is between Menagerie and Big Top. Big Top is air conditioned, of course. As part of the spec, the show carried the old Hagenbeck-Wallace-Sells Floto calliope [Two Jesters] and the Chimes bell wagon. Both looked fine, even with rubber tires. Chimes was green, white and gold. Calliope was blue, white and gold. Calliope had gas heater for steam instead of coal. Show was too late for us to see the performance (5:30 p.m.) so we left about six to get Mother and Mrs. B.

I noticed on the lot Henry Ringling North, Merle Evans, Fred Bradna, Walter McClain, and others. Props seen in the backyard were very cumbersome and complicated. It is my guess that they will have to reduce the weight and detail of these. Same goes for props and decorations all through the show. All cages were

entirely blue except the gorilla cages which were still white. Menagerie had new interior layout with giraffe corral at one end and monkey island at the other. Monkey island was not in St. Louis, having been abandoned because of weight and work. Interior of cages painted as jungle scenes. Scenery placed between the cages and under them. Trucks and tractors were green and blue. Left lot about 6:00 and got home about ten. Hope to see show later in season—perhaps at Terre Haute or Indianapolis—stands immediately after St. Louis.

### **Cole Bros. Circus, Peoria, Illinois, June 24, 1941**

Got up at 4:00 a.m. and drove to Peoria with Mother and Bob. Took Mother downtown and went to railroad. Show was not in yet and we waited about an hour. It got in about 9:00 a.m., and it looked fine. Flats of cages were especially good. After a lot of switching they began to unload. They had eight draft horses and used them at the runs along with a couple of elephants. Trucks took the wagons to the lot and there



*The great side show bandmaster Perry G. Lowery befriended the young Parkinson on the Cole Bros. Circus in the early 1940s. Pfening Archives.*



Caterpillar tractors took over. Show had Columbia tableau and the little pony floats Mother Goose and Old Woman in Shoe. Did not carry calliope. Had eleven cages, including several old Hagenbeck-Wallace cages. Had two tractors and four Mack trucks, fourteen elephants, two power plants, one stake driver, four stock cars, twelve flats, eight coaches, four camels, and five zebras. All tents were white except the Big Top, which was a beautiful blue with drawings of animals on the outside edge, names of the states in the union on the inside edge, and red and white stripes in the dome with a field of stars at each end of the stripes. It was really the best looking tent I have seen. Effect was just as good at night for lighting effects.

Three rings. Side show was fair. P. G. Lowery was the kid-show bandleader and gave it class. Menagerie was a little too large for the number of cages they had, but looked OK. Had horse fair tent for first time on this show, and it was fine. Horses were all fixed up for spec. They had about 100 ring horses in the horse fair and the eight draft horses in the menagerie. Bob and I visited with P. G. Lowery and his band twice and saw his side show. We also visited Art Borella in the clown alley for some time. He took us to eat in the dining top where we had a delicious plate of ham, potatoes, gravy, etc. Spotted Borella in the show several times. Afternoon show was a fair house.

Later, the night show was the best single performance so far that season. A turnaway was registered at that time. Downtown there was a huge amount of Ringling "Wait" paper for August 19<sup>th</sup>, but it had little effect on Cole. During the morning, the show had traded in an old tractor for a new Caterpillar, and the folks on the lot like that a lot—probably decided to go then. Performance was wonderful with the spec *Pan American* tops. The Reiffenach troupe was fine as was Dorothy Herbert, Emmett Kelly, Otto Greibling, and others. Finale *Your Land and Mine* good with all people dressed as soldiers, sailors, marines, nurses, etc. around Uncle Sam. At very end a huge flag was unfurled as a background. A singer, Florence Tennyson, was the first in a circus I have enjoyed. Señor Juan Lobo of Mexico had the concert. After the show, we took Borella uptown and also got Mother. Then home. Arrived about 6:00 p.m. after a fine circus day.



Cole Bros. Circus electrical generator wagon, location unknown, 1941. Pfening Archives.

## Cole Bros. Circus and CFA Convention, Springfield, Illinois, July 22, 1941

Bob and I got up about 6:00 a.m. and drove to Springfield to see Cole. This was the last day of the Circus Fans Association convention and the CFAs were around all day. We arrived about 7:00 a.m. Watched the train switch and unload. Several of the fans were taking movies, but we took none. Equipment of show was same as listed above under Peoria stand. All looked good. On the lot we watched erection and fans were very thick; but we saw none we knew and didn't talk with any of them. About noon the band, six elephants, and two buses of CFAs went uptown for some bally. Bob and I followed. Vic Robbins' band played on the court house yard.

Then procession went to newspapers, etc., and to store used for downtown ticket sales. There the fans were interviewed on the radio. Fans were also on the heads of some of the elephants. Back on lot, we went to the matinee. Menagerie appeared to be more full this time, but was really the same number of cages, etc. Horse fair still fine. In Big Show, house was about a  $\frac{3}{4}$  one. Enjoyed show very much. All the CFA's were in the backyard at this time taking photos, etc. After the show, we went to town to get a few lithos and newspapers. Went back to lot and met the Backsteins who wanted to go down town again so back we went this time to see if any fans we knew were registered at the hotel, but none were there. Lobby of hotel was filled with circus posters. Went back to lot and found Art Borella who took Bob and me into the dressing tent where we talked until show time. Then we watched show from backyard. Had a big time watching clowns making up. Talked a little each with Horace Laird, Toby Tyler, Fred (?), [Paul] Wenzel, and others. Also saw Emmett Kelly, Otto Greibling, and others. When they all came out after the spec, they said it was another Peoria. People were jammed everywhere and they were on the straw at both ends and in front of the reserves. CFAs sat in a body. Show stopped once to welcome CFAs and Zack Terrell talked then. Stopped later for CFA to give horse trainer John Smith a flower horseshoe. Smith came from Springfield. Several acts such as the races, Dorothy Herbert, 12-horse hitch, etc. were omitted because of the crowd. A girl was injured by a horse. After the show was over, I went to see P. G. Lowery again. We had seen him a few minutes at the runs that morning but missed him all day. We talked there with him



Cole Bros. Circus menagerie interior, Buffalo, May 25-27, 1941. Pfening Archives.



until Borella got dressed and then we took him down to the CFA banquet at the hotel. We did not attend the banquet. Arrived home at midnight after another big day.

The clown named above, Fred [Paul] Wenzel, surprised us by opening a conversation with us in the backyard during the night show and telling us that he was one of Art Borella's trio when we first met Borella in Decatur in 1938 and that he remembered me from that time. In the dressing tent Art Borella still had his duck. And every time Otto Greibling went "Quack quack" the duck would answer, but only did this for Otto. Also seen in backyard was Ira Watts who is assistant manager. He talked to a man we thought to be Earl Chapin May and mentioned breaking an ankle "on the old Sparks show" many years before. We had also seen Zack Terrell around the lot.

### **Cole Bros. Circus, Indianapolis, Indiana, May 3, 1942**

I took a bus from the U. of I. campus to Indianapolis, leaving at 8:00 a.m. and arriving at noon. At 12:30 I was on the lot. The day was cloudy and there had been some rain. Immediately after arriving on the lot I went into the side show to see P. G. Lowery, side show band leader. He recognized me and we had a nice visit. He couldn't get over how far I had come to see the show. Also introduced me to the side show manager, Arthur Hoffman. About 1:00 p.m. I bought my ticket, but I went to the dressing tent to see Art Borella, joey, before going to the show. Rain had flooded part of the backyard and in the dressing top some trunks were in water. Art was not there so I waited a while, talking with his young assistant. It was getting late so I went to the show. Menagerie had eleven cages, and all had solid rubber tires on them. They, as well as all wagons on the show, were newly painted and looked fine. Show had horse fair, and 55 horses in it. Also had eight draft horses in

menagerie top. All tents were used year before, too, including Big Top which was blue with red and white stripes in the very top, and stars where poles met the tent. It was a little worn and not quite so good looking as the year before. Vic Robbins was bandmaster with twelve men. Spec was good though the same as the year before and a little worn. This may have been the impression given because of the rain however. About this time a terrific rain storm broke and the rain came down in torrents. Some in the near full house became uneasy and left. The tent leaked in a very few places. Show went on with Hubert Castle, Reiffenachs, Flying Thrillers, etc. doing well. Australian Wallabies, which got top billing, were nothing special as acrobats. Cable broke on safety net just as Thrillers went on. Clowns seemed to have very little part in show. Nothing but paper mache walkarounds, it seemed. They included Otto Greibling, Freddy Freeman, Harold Hall, Scotty, Bill Bailey, and others. Art Borella did not go on that day. The finale was much the same as the year before, too. In each ring was a group of people dressed as soldiers, sailors, nurses, etc., and as an ending a huge flag was unfurled behind them. Fireworks went off, and pictures of Roosevelt and Douglas MacArthur were unrolled. (These two photos were new this year.) An Uncle Sam topped the group in the center ring. Show closed singing the national anthem. People liked it and it was really a good show. The rain did seem to dull it however. Costumes were not so fresh looking. After the show I returned to the dressing top to see Borella, but this time they said he was sick and wouldn't be around that day. I talked then for a while with Bill Bailey and others. Borella's assistant offered me a job with Art. I gave up looking for Art and went back through the flood to the side show to visit again with Lowery. Saw the side show clear through and really enjoyed it. I left there about 7:00 p.m. and took one more look for Borella. Then I loafed around the midway until 8:30 before going to the bus station and thence home by 1:30 a.m.

This show was good, but rain spoiled it a little. It was fresh looking and I enjoyed it a lot. They had Columbia tableau as white ticket wagon, Mother Goose and Woman in Shoe tabs in spec. Did not carry the steam calliope.

### **Lewis Bros. Combined with Whitey Ford Circus, Danville, Illinois, June 14, 1942**

Left Champaign on interurban at 10:00 a.m.; arrived Danville, 11:00. Ate, then went to lot. Show looked small having only two tents: big top and small stables top. Had ten trucks: poles, props, stake-driver, canvas, tickets, power, seats, three stock trucks; eight horses, about eight ponies, one donkey, one seal, eleven



*Cole Bros. Circus unloading, location unknown, probably 1942. Don Smith photo, Pfening Archives.*



dogs, one elephant, four in band including calliope. Shortly after I had arrived, the rest of the family came onto the lot. They had been to Champaign looking for me. We went downtown to eat and write a letter to my draft board. Returned to lot and they went home. I spoke to Paul Lewis momentarily. Bought ticket and went into small Big Top. It was small but good, having two rings and an extra large bandstand. Seats all around except on back side. Reserves were bible backs (30¢). Show started off with pony drill. Had ladder act, single trapeze stuff, elephant, seal, dogs, clown, acrobat, liberty horses, wire, unsupported ladder, etc. acts. Also, as last part of big show was Whitey Ford's ("The Duke of Paducah," NBC radio star) barn dance type show on the bandstand. Had seven more people in this part. They sang hill-bill songs and Ford did comedy routine. (This part of show was used every day except Fridays when the troupe returned to Chicago for their broadcast.) Dorothy Herbert, rider, had the concert as well as doing liberty horse act in big show.

This little two-ring show was good. It showed to a packed house and pleased the people. Acts were good except clown and one girl in trapeze act who refused to smile. Also wire walker fell three times trying to do his finale. But the show was a dandy one and well worth the money. Whitey Ford's part was different for a circus and was well done.

In the concert Dorothy Herbert did her blindfolded jump over burning hurdle.

After the show, which last two hours counting concert, I talked with the mail agent and got some route cards. Then caught the 5:30 interurban for Champaign. Arrived home at 6:30 p.m. well pleased with the whole show.

### Cole Bros. America's Favorite Circus, Peoria, Illinois, June 30, 1942

Left Champaign day before and went home. Bob, Mother, and I went to Peoria June 30 then, and leaving Mother downtown, we went to the Peoria Heights lot. Caught the last of unloading and while there a fan named [Frank] Meyers, who knew Backstein, introduced himself. Looked over the flats and stocks and then went to the lot. Flats were yellow; stocks, red. On the lot things were



Clown Arthur Borella, shown here on Cole Bros. Circus in 1942, was another trouper who was friends with Parkinson. Burt Wilson albums, Pfening Archives.

pretty well along. I talked with P. G. Lowery a while and when I was in the side show top saw them putting up a gambling game. P. G. said, "They will have that game in here!" Watched erection a while then. An elephant spotting white ticket wagon got mad and pulled the wagon too far then chased the keeper. They took him back and got another. All the bulls were squealing. We had been looking for Borella all day but didn't see him 'till 1:00 p.m. Talked with him in dressing top until he had to go help put rigging up. Went to the show and enjoyed it a lot again. They had another man billed as Juan Lobo and Borella later said Lobo was fired for drinking. Ernestine Clarke was good and good looking, in Reiffenach act, and others.

Just before the show a man approached me and offered passes if I would help "draw a crowd to the side show." He didn't know I was a fan. Talked with him a few minutes trying to find out what I was to do and it developed that I was to shill for the kid show game, playing a quarter when the operator gave me the signal. I didn't do it.

Also, earlier, I had seen Harry Thomas on the lot and, calling him by name, asked to take his picture. He asked how I knew him and I told him I was a fan. Then we talked about the war and the show. He said that they had no trouble with the railroads and troop trains. He said the worst trouble was getting men to stay. They got them but they lasted only a few weeks in most cases. But he said they had more trouble along that line the year before. Nice guy to chat with. (The show had classified ads in the papers for 50 men, and they also had a sign on the lot for men wanted.)

After the show we went back to Borella, talked a few minutes and then went to the cookhouse for supper. Sat at the clown table and saw Bill Bailey, whom I met in Indianapolis, again. Meal was darn good and the people were very hospitable. After this we went to the car and there Art talked a long time about different shows and about how he would like to see a classy one-ringer put out where he could do more professional acts and get more attention.

Bob went in to see Lowery a few minutes then we went to get Mother and also some lithos. Arrived in Decatur at 8:30 and then Bob came over to Champaign with me arriving 10:30. Good day with a good circus, good talks with several circus people, good circus meal, and good circus weather.

The show had been doing fine business but the Peoria matinee was light.



Cole Bros. cookhouse wagon being unloaded, Jamestown, New York, June 15, 1942. William Koford photo, Pfening Archives.



## Wallace Bros. Circus, Champaign, Illinois, July 23, 1942

Left SAE house about 6:45 and arrived on lot about 7:00 a.m. Show was already on the lot, having moved in from Danville the early part of the night. Trucks were parked on the lot. Soon after my arrival they spotted trucks and began erection. Equipment was painted patriotically with red, white and blue stripes, stars and victory "Vs" painted on many of the trucks, etc. Show carried no cages, had seven bulls, four seals, 33 trucks plus private house trailers, 22 horses, including eight for Loyal-Repensky act, six ponies, one mule, one colt. Heard considerable complaint about the lack of cages. Also many people thought they were seeing Hagenbeck-Wallace.

Tents were up by 10:00 a.m., and things were pretty well finished when I went home at 11:00. I returned at 1:00 p.m. with Robert Arnold to see the show. Tickets 88¢, reserves 55¢, kids 40¢ (or with newspaper coupons, 25¢). Show had a full house though there were still some few seats left. Show had bar act, bull act, liberty and menage horses, good clowns, seals, dogs, juggler, etc. Features were Loyal-Repensky troupe (which also did a Risley act, a juggling act, and acted as candy-butchers). Band had seven, plus calliope. Enjoyed show ok. Did not stay to see Baron Nowak's concert. (He's a midget.) After show found Mike Guy, bandleader and mail agent, and got some route cards. Also got some older cards from ticket wagon. Stars of show besides Loyal-Repensky troupe were Ray Goody, wire; Ira [Erma] Ward, one arm planges; Pickard's Seals; Rogers' Elephants; the eight or ten clowns; and Flying Hartzells. Had about five full-time clowns; others doubled.



Wallace Bros. Circus side show band, Greensburg, Pennsylvania, May 13, 1942. Pfening Archives.

When I got back to the house after the show I read in the paper that G. Wylie Overly, banker and amateur clown, was on the show. Not until then did I recognize or remember him from the show that afternoon. I did remember then that he was the best clown of the lot. (He is not included in the clown numbers above.)

After supper I caught the traction for Decatur. Bob met me and we went home by way of Decatur circus lot. Wallace Bros. cookhouse had already arrived and was unloading.

## Wallace Bros. Circus, Decatur, Illinois, July 24, 1942

As I had seen show day before in Champaign, I did not get up to see them unloaded, etc. Bob did, however. I arrived on lot about



G. Wylie Overly, a Pennsylvania banker, spent his summer vacations clowning on circuses, starting on the Tom Mix show in 1937. Parkinson visited with him on Wallace Bros. in 1942. Burt Wilson albums, Pfening Archives.

9:30. Looked around for Overly's car, but did not find it for some time. Did see Bill Backstein and found Bob. While we were talking, Overly and wife drove onto lot. Introduced myself and Bob and Bill. Talked a few minutes, looked at some pictures taken of him in Champaign, and told him how to get to the *Herald-Review*. He was a very nice man and easy to talk to. Asked me what I thought of his acts (and they were good). As show was then up, I went home to return at 1:00 p.m. for the show. Decided to see it the second time and Bob and I went in. House was same as at matinee in Champaign the day before; only slightly less than full. Show was enjoyed more than first time. Especially noted Overly's acts again. After the show Overly had left so missed him. Bob stayed for concert. I went home again. At 7:00 p.m. we went back. Met Backstein and we went to the dressing tent. Found Overly and the other clowns and had a nice chat. Overly talked to Mrs. [Ray] Rogers (manager's wife) and got us in the show. (Third time for me and all three in reserves.) People were coming in strong. Show was delayed by crowd. Reserve seat ticket seller shouted to man to tell them to quit selling tickets outside. Huge crowd stood in connection until seats were provided. Every available seat was brought in including camp chairs from private trailers, etc. Tent was packed to the gills. Some had to sit on



Wallace Bros. Circus ticket semi-trailer, location unknown, 1942. Pfening Archives.



ground. Turnaway! Show was half-hour late. Then really got under way. Applause was strong throughout. Star on Loyal-Repensky's had trouble-doing somersault from one horse to another, but did come through. Overly and other clowns were very good as was the whole show. After the show Backstein left and Bob and I stayed 'till trucks were loaded and on their way. Show loaded by 1:00 a.m. Trucks left as they were ready and some house trailers left, too. But some trailers stayed on lot overnight. Bob and I went to corner of Fairview and Main to see last string of six trucks come up street and turn toward Springfield.

Two very good circus days with a top-notch truck show.

The show had ten large electric fans for cooling the Big Top. Saw Ray Rogers around lot both days. At end of spec, a girl sing *God Bless America* and a large U.S. flag unfurls over bandstand.

### Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, Peoria, Illinois, September 29, 1942

On Monday, 28<sup>th</sup>, I went home from Champaign on the ITSRR. Bob and I left for Peoria about 7:30 Tuesday morning, arriving about 9:30. Saw the second section of the Big One entering the yards. Went at once to runs. Got big thrill seeing the long train going through yards. Watched unloading a while, and before we had been there long, a fan introduced himself as Mr. [Aaron] Brill. He was with Frank Meyers and wife, and Billy Backstein. This crowd was then together most of the day. The first section had arrived about 6:00 a.m. and there was a little trouble taking the wagons over a soft road by the runs. Weather was cold, snow possible. Later in the day however, it was very nice, turning warm, the sun coming out, and coats were no longer needed.

At the runs we saw the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> sections coming in, the last getting there about 10:00 a.m. from Rockford. At runs, too, we first saw the army jeep that was on the show. Show used bulls for pull-over on first section and then tractors. The whole bunch got lunch about 11:00 and then went to lot. On way, Bob and I went by runs again and then followed show's route to lot. Saw two strings of wagons miss a turn. Got to lot about noon and at that time only the cook-house and stables were up. Big Top and menagerie on ground.

Cages used by [Alfred] Court's animal act were red with sunburst wheels. Menagerie cages were entirely blue. The jeep was used on the lot by some official, maybe lot superintendent. Show had four

giraffe wagons, none used to haul props. Also had old Tim McCoy ticket wagon, and we later found that it was used to house music recording equipment. (The band was not on show, having been pulled early in season by union officials.) All wagons had special license plates issued for Ringling by Florida. For example wagon 35 would have Florida license number "R-B 35." Ticket wagons were red, white and blue instead of usual red, white and yellow.

Labor shortage was bad. In Chicago 77 men had been drafted and show was 400 short. Evidently because of this many things were not put up—like side show pylons used in previous couple of years, side show entrance, gorilla tent, etc. Show did not use horse fair setup. Tent was put up in backyard, but they did use the stables or stalls the same as when they used horse fair. Perhaps this was done only in Peoria. Gorillas were put in regular menagerie, probably because of amount of time and labor needed to put up gorilla tent. Show was using young boys and even one-armed men for labor.

From time show was fairly well along, we all stood at back entrance to the lot. Old Sells-Floto calliope and Ringling bell wagon came on. Also a large number of spec floats, and carriages for displays. Some of these floats were on wagons also used for general hauling. All floats were decorated with paper mache-type stuff. Bell wagon had paper ice on it for Christmas. Calliope had "Happy New Year" signs tacked on it. There was a lot of work preparing the various floats and they certainly slowed down the whole process. Air-conditioning wagons were not put into place.

Show started about 4:30. Menagerie looked good with effective lighting system in cages. No signs left of [Cleveland menagerie] fire except absence of camels, zebras, though perhaps it was smaller than in former years. Top was white; Big Top blue. Sat in blues with Brill, B. Backstein, and Bob. Crowd was smaller—perhaps half-house. Court's animals in all rings opened show. Spec *Holidays* was about fourth. Ballet of elephants was attractive with bulls wearing pink skirts and girls in matching costumes, though routine was not very new. Modoc was premier ballerina. Another big spectacle was the aerial ballet starring Elly Ardely with around fifty girls doing good rope tricks. Finale had girls in red, white and blue on ladders around huge blue flags with white stars. Flags (four) drop to reveal huge pictures of Roosevelt. Fireworks go off. Lighting in whole show was wonderful as was costuming. However, the whole show seemed slow and because of the lack of a band lacked kick. Part of



Ringling-Barnum Circus center pole wagon being unloaded, location unknown, 1942. Bob Good photo, Pfening Archives.





*Ringling-Barnum Circus at Pittsburgh, August 1, 1942. Note air conditioning ducts on big top. Pfening Archives.*

this was undoubtedly due to lateness of show and small crowd. The jeep was used in *Holidays*. Clowns were only fair, not appearing much. Emmett Kelly was around quite a bit, but didn't do much. Felix Adler was noticed only as Santa Clause in spec. Calliope and bell wagon played in spec.

General admission was \$1.25.

We got out of the show at 6:45. Already a crowd was in midway for night show. Went through back yard, got some route cards, and then went to the home of Frank Meyers. Saw his circus stuff on the walls including nine of the heads off of the old Asia bandwagon.

Left the [lot] at 7:30 arriving in Decatur at 9:20 and catching a 9:30 traction to Champaign.

Felt at the time that this might be the last circus trip for us for the duration of the war. Gas rationing going into effect soon so can't use car. Will be in Army next summer and may not get to see any circuses.

### **Dailey Bros. Circus, Bloomington, Illinois, September 11, 1946**

[This entry was a letter to his brother Bob, dated September 12, 1946, and apparently never mailed.] Went to Bloomington and Dailey today. Arrived there at 11:00, went to the lot and found nothing there. So I stopped to ask people what the news was. I asked a fat guy I thought might be with it if not for it, but he was from WJBC. I took him then to the railroad yards. No show there either. Without my saying anything about such stuff, the radio guy asked if I were from *The Pantagraph*. Then he told me what a sad character the Dailey advance man was, drinks, dirty, etc. Also told me about Cole Bros. elephant car being wrecked. At the runs, no activity, so I headed out for Pontiac to find the train.

About ten miles out I saw smoke, turned over to the tracks and there I saw the bright red Dailey train. From the distance it looked great, like Cole here in '40, but closer the stuff looked muddy, in

need of paint, and a little battered.

I went back to wait for the show then and at the yards there were two station wagons, obviously show-stuff. I asked the fellow in one if he knew anything about Cole's wreck. I wanted to know if [Bill] Woodcock might have been hurt. This Dailey man's name was Simcox, I think. He hadn't heard about the wreck, but did talk more. The show train pulled into sight after noon and this guy said, "They'll be a hungry bunch on there. The pie car doesn't have stuff to feed them when the train is late this way." Innocently I said, "Yes, I guess they can't eat slot machines, can they?" The guy gave me a quick, queer look, said "Say, what do you know about this show?" and walked away. I saw him all day, and he wouldn't speak again. Ha Ha.

The train was spotted at 12:30 and they went right after it in typical smooth, fast, calm Dailey style. Five minutes saw the train teams pulling runs out. Ten minutes and the bulls were gone with horses following fairly soon. I went down the line to snap loaded flats, and they were well along when I got back to the runs. They have three trucks and also used a local one. The train teams are good, especially one fine looking pair of Sorrels. No hungry look about them like so many show's horses, including Cole's, have. I watched unloading for an hour, and they were almost through then.

After lunch then, I went to the lot. The pad room was up and poles for the tops were going up. They have new canvas as you know. Everything was on the lot around 2:00 or 2:30, cages being last. They didn't bring the carry-all and Caterpillar to the lot at all. In detail, I watched the sideshow canvas crew work. They whipped things into shape pretty fast. At 3:45 they called for opening bally. Kid show goes for two-bits. Before that time, the menagerie and Big Top were raised, and a little after 4:00 seats were going in fast. But the flag was up and guys went to eat. Things were moving, but it was Dailey style. I just watched, nothing exciting. Except that a lucky boy came up to me and gave me the spiel to be a shill for him. He





*Dailey Bros. Circus flats arriving late at Bloomington, Illinois, September 11, 1946. Tom Parkinson photo, Pfening Archives.*

asked if I was going to see the show. I said yes. Did I want to see it free—and with no dirty work? I said, “How?” He said all I had to do was help him gather a crowd—or attract a crowd it was.

“You mean you need a skill?”

“Oh, no—well, yes, that’s exactly what I mean.”

“Nope.”

I saw Bertha Drane and waited around the ticket wagon for her. It was *Billboard* day and she had a heavy load and work. Finally I stopped her and asked for some extra route cards. All but current ones were at the cars, but we went back to the red wagon to get some of this week’s. There she introduced me to about 10-11 people as “Bob Parkinson’s brother.” And they all perked up. She said she had a letter from you yesterday. I met Mrs. Davenport, another guy that remembered Gallup, and also George Steele, and I met the #2 man on the show, a Mr. Finn or something [probably Charles White]. He was nice and looked nice. I think he was the fixer from the wild story he tried to tell. Bertha and Mrs. D. asked me to the cookhouse for supper and I said ok. But they had to go someplace first and left me with Finn.

The sheriff showed up and picked up a kid who had run away from home in Pontiac, and Finn worked on that. I waited around the tax box and red wagon for a long time. Too long I guess, because I was no longer a *Pantagraph* reporter or McLean County’s own prize rube and shill. Now I seemed to be on the show, because six people came up to ask me when the thing would start or something similar that indicated for sure they thought I was with it. I was at the ticket wagon when a lady asked me if that was the office. I told her, so she started to tell me her troubles. After I sent her to the office, I learned she was Mrs. O’Neal, owner of the lot, with some trouble of some kind.

The matinee [time] was indefinite, a long time. Then they painted a sign which said it would be at 5:00. But about that time there was no one on the lot, so it was cancelled. Norma Davenport came to the red wagon and asked, “Are we or are we not?” And that was the question with everyone for a while. But they didn’t.

Bertha, etc. left about 4:45 or 5:00. At 5:40 I left. Got tired of waiting and didn’t want to stay there until 10:00 or 11:00 tonight. So I got train shots, cage shots, credit for three jobs, route cards, spoke to Bertha, Tiger Bill [Synder], and the others, missed the joe[y] with the terribly long hair, saw lots of beautiful horses—draft and ring, got no programs, and saw no show. Then got home at 6:30.

The show is ok. The delay was due to the railroad. It

seems the engine got low on water, left the train while it went after a refill. So the short jump took eleven hours, and cost them a matinee. I don’t think there would have been any crowd anyway. Too cool. Equipment is good, as you know, but it isn’t ornate and there is no thrill to seeing it. No carved ticket wagons or circusy cages or wheels. It looked better on the Gallup lot, but it looked good here, too. The tops look fine as does the banner line and marquee. The horses are excellent. And as *Billboard* said, they have more draft stock than they need. In fact they don’t even have most of it in harness at all. Eighteen head all together and they used six or eight. Those Palominos we couldn’t figure out in Gallup are more draft stock. I wish Big Ben would send the “first \$3,500” for

the old Christy wagons and put on a parade. With a little more draft stock and the parade wagons included in that Christy ad, he’d have it. And as we said before and *Billboard* concurred, they could use a kick in the program—aerial, animals, or bareback at least. All three at best.

Noticed a good attitude toward lot lice. Workmen politely asked kids to keep bikes out by saying “You’re welcome, the bike isn’t,” etc. Very nicely done. Other instances, too, as when folks asked about the matinee. A wheel of some sort talked to an old farmer couple for ten minutes, politely telling them that they arrived too late, that they would give a two hour show tonight, etc. Ok. And they treated me fine, too. Would have been even better if I had stayed around.

Not much else, I guess. They play Taylorville soon and I may think about dropping down there only for the night show. Don’t know yet.

Dailey is ok. Now I’d like to see Beatty make a bee-line through here headed for the South.

See you soon—whoops, just realized you’ll be here in person before this could get to you there. Too late now. BW

*Tom Parkinson (1921-1993) was circus editor of Billboard from 1950 to 1960. He later managed the Assembly Hall at the University of Illinois. His articles and books are invaluable in understanding the twentieth century American circus.*



*Dailey Bros. Circus concessions truck at Watseka, Illinois, September 14, 1946. Burt Wilson albums, Pfening Archives.*





James Reilley, Van Ambrugh: Bareback Rider, Ink on paper, Tibbals Collection, ht2004884

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# This Clown Has Made 20,000,000 People Laugh

by Earl Chapin May

Pete Mardo, nee Peter Anthony Guckeyson, was born in Dubuque, Iowa in 1881. He spent thirty-four years in the circus business, starting on Sun Bros. Circus in the 1890s. He later appeared on Barnum and Bailey, Ringling Bros., Ringling-Barnum, Sparks, and John Robinson, spending much of his career in the Ringling and Sparks organizations. His 1929 tour with Hagenbeck-Wallace was his last recorded season. After he and his wife Florence left the circus, they operated restaurants in the Akron, Ohio area.

Early in his career Mardo did a knockabout acrobatic act called the Mardo Trio. Later he turned to clowning where he eventually became an innovative producing clown. The July 24, 1928 Crawfordsville (Indiana) Review called him, "one of the most original clowns that ever scampered along the sawdust trail." He is also remembered for the photograph albums he sold while on Ringling-Barnum



Letterhead used by Mardo Trio in 1913. Pfening Archives.



Pete Mardo in makeup and costume on Sparks Circus, 1923. Frederick Glasier photo, The Ringling Museum.

and Hagenbeck-Wallace. These pictorial route books are prized by collectors today. He died in 1956 in Akron. This article originally appeared in the June 1924 issue of *The American Magazine*. In it he explicates his philosophy of clowning, and reveals himself as a thoughtful practitioner of the art.

One day I sat in Clown Alley of the Sparks Circus while Pete Mardo rubbed clown white into his mobile face and told me what amuses "towners," as the circus folks call us outsiders.

"I've seen some twenty million towners laugh during the thirty years I've clowned the show," he told me. "They laugh at me for two main reasons: I do something that was funny to them years ago, when they were kids, or I surprise them into laughing."

He finished rubbing the mixture of lard, oxide of zinc, and tincture of benzoin into his cheeks, then paused long enough to say: "You remember how you and the rest of us kids used to laugh at Skinny Pallo with his knock knees, splay feet, big hands, and elbows sticking out in all directions? And you know what a kidding we always gave Fat Adams, specially in swimming? And how we joshed Sorrel Top McGinnis, with his red hair sticking up like a plush mop?"

"Well, when I'm clowning in the big top, I'm just those kids grown up, with all their oddities exaggerated. And the folks in the audience are just the same kind of kids we played with—just the same kind at heart, whether they are six or sixty years old. Get me?"

I nodded.

"A clown will get a lot of laughs if he'll just study kids," Pete went on. "You remember the fun we had when we'd get Cal Dassell on his hands and knees, and then back Si Holcomb up against Cal and tip



'em over? Well, I guess none of us ever get over the fun of hanging the laugh on the other fellow. A funny fall is a funny fall from the cradle to the grave."

Pete laid on the red lines which made a broad gash of his good-natured mouth, painted two garish triangles on his white cheeks, sketched in a few black lines from the corners of his eyes, lighted his pipe, sat down on his trunk, and went on: "Long before I thought of being a clown, us kids in Akron used to think it was smart to make faces at the cops—always behind the cops' backs! Then we'd run, whether anyone saw us or not. Our mothers brought us up in the fear of the law, which to us meant the cops. So we'd have liked to get the laugh on them.

"That's where the circus cops come from. Every kid in the audience laughs when the clown cop trips and falls flat, or when the elephant almost steps on him. It's a scream when he does funny swings on the trapeze, loses his helmet, falls into the net, and bounces around with his big feet waving helplessly in the air. They'd just love to see the cop on their own home beat in the same fix; so they yell when the clown cop makes himself ridiculous. That's the kids' way of getting back at the cop. And the old folks laugh, because they were kids once.

"Of course they turn right around and yell for the cop when he dashes down the circus track in his little patrol wagon and pinches some clown for being drunk and disorderly. The laugh then is on

the fellow that's pinched.

"Every kid has a sore toe sometimes. And that toe is funny—to most everyone but the fellow that's got it! When I was a First of May, that is, a first-season clown, I had to do a walkaround on the track in flapping white clothes and a huge pair of white feet. The make-up was supposed to be funny enough to get the laugh.

"One night I didn't tie one foot on tight enough; and I'd hardly got on the track before I stubbed my toe against a stake—really stubbed it—and off came one false foot.

"The circus lot was covered with sharp stubble; and when I stepped on these sharp points they actually cut my bare foot. I couldn't stop, except to pick up the false foot; so there I went, hopping and hobbling around that track with one false foot in my hand.

"Oh, it was funny, all right! The towners had the time of their lives. But I left a trail of blood. Properly protected, I have faked that sore-toe walk many a time since, with great success; but it cost me real suffering to get onto that bit of comedy.

"The clown barber shop has been a sure-fire hit in the circus business for a century. Why? Because every man feels foolish when he has his face lathered in a barber chair. All the women I ever talked to insist that a man with his face lathered is about the funniest thing in the world. The circus clown takes those two facts and plays them up.

## A FEATURE ACT THAT IS FULL OF FUNNY SITUATIONS



LEADING TO A NOVEL FINISH WHICH

## CREATES UPROARS OF LAUGHTER

*Illustration of Mardo Trio's act from a promotional brochure, c. 1914. Pfening Archives.*



"The barber, in this scene, is armed with an enormous razor, and his assistant stands by with a pail filled with suds. The victim in the chair is lathered with a big paint brush. The soapsuds cover his eyes, ears, nose, and throat. Finally, the assistant pours the whole pail full of suds over the victim's head. It doesn't sound funny, but it's a scream every time it's put on. It's a broad burlesque of what every man goes through when he is shaved.

"The first time I was drafted to take the chair in this circus barber



*Florence Mardo was a capable equestrienne. She is shown here on Ringling-Barnum in 1925. Burt Wilson albums, Pfening Archives.*

shop scene I opened my mouth once, to make some protest. It was promptly filled with soapsuds. In my agony I opened my eyes. They were filled with soapsuds, too. I was sick for days; but the audience certainly enjoyed it.

"All this sounds crude and elemental; but I suppose it is because circus clowning is crude and elemental that it has such an appeal. Circus crowds come to circuses frankly to be amused. They do not come to think. They don't know why they laugh at a clown. But

the clown knows that they laugh because it is something they have laughed at when they were kids.

"Take the slapstick, without which no circus clown outfit is complete. On the business end of each is a detonating cap. One clown hits another clown with the slapstick and the cap explodes. It makes no difference whether the clown is a first-season 'First of May,' a second season 'Johnny Come Lately,' or a veteran, high-grade 'Producing Clown'—one who originates clown comedy—he can get a laugh with an explosive slapstick.

"Now, don't you see some relationship between the clown's slapstick and the parental palm, or the family hair brush, applied to disobedient kids? Most of us cried when we were spanked—but it seems funny to us now.

I had this illustrated one season on the Ringling Show when we played one of the college towns. Every so often the college crowds are not satisfied with yelling, bawling out the official announcer and throwing things at the actors. Some of them think they must come down off the seats and join in the performance.

"On this particular night one local college comedian insisted on joining me on the hippodrome track. He had no business there, and he was just about as funny as a crutch. Moreover, he was spoiling my comedy.

"But I've learned from experience that it doesn't do to get mad at a college crowd. You must clown with them and not at them. So I let this chap join in the sport as long as I could stand it. Then I got him to stoop over, whereupon I soaked him with an explosive slapstick. The towners on the blue seats roared. My slapstick was a hit in more ways than one.

"Soak him again!" his college friends pleaded at the top of their voices.

"But he had had enough. He forced a laugh on himself and sneaked back to his seat. The crowd was happy, because it reminded them of the spankings they had got. He was unhappy for the same reason.

"That bit of impromptu comedy brought in the other important element in circus clowning—the Surprise Finish.

"The clown band has for years been listed among sure-fire clown hits; but it wouldn't be worth anything if it wasn't for the surprise finish when Nemo is playing his trombone solo, *How Dry I Am*, and a bucket of water descends on him. The spectators roar with laughter when Nemo limps out, trying to hold his sodden garments from his shrinking frame.

"You see, everyone has been 'wet to the skin' at some time or other. The experience was unpleasant enough at the time, but it seems funny now—especially when it happens to someone else.

"One of the commonest examples of the surprise finish in the clown business is known as 'The Somersault over the Broom.' This is done by a clown group working on the hippodrome track to fill the 'stops' during which the principal lady and gentleman riders pause to rest themselves and their horses. These 'stops' last but a few seconds. The clown comedy, therefore, must arrest attention, get through the business, reach a climax and quit within half a minute.

"In the Somersault over the Broom the First Clown gets the Second Clown to stoop down and look along the track; then the Third Clown soaks the Second Clown with a broom. While the First and Third Clowns are laughing at him the Second Clown seizes the broom and swings it at the Third Clown. He leaps into the air and turns a somersault while the broom continues in its swing and hits the First Clown in the stomach. The audience is surprised into laughter because it thought the Third Clown was going to be hit.



"The surprise finish is also known among us clowns as the Double Cross. I thought it was well named, one day at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I was playing Third Clown, and did my somersault exactly on time. But the Second Clown had swung his broom too quickly, and it struck me full in the face while I was in the air upside down!

"I saw more stars that instant than I have seen in all subsequent years under the big top. I also bled freely from the nose. But the audience thought that it was very funny.

"When I was on the Wallace Show we had another trick, called the Cannon Trick, that had a surprise finish. A clown was thrown into a cannon's mouth. Once inside, he crawled into a secret compartment over a dummy clown dressed like him. At a signal, a powder charge was fired and the dummy shot out the length of a long and powerful elastic. This dummy rode on a rod resting against a coiled spring.

"My job was to see that the rod was not dislodged by the real clown inside the cannon. But one day, when I was looking into the cannon and fussing with the rod, the gun was fired before the signal was given. If the rod had been in place I should have lost all my head. As it was I was merely scarred for life. But the audience thought it was immense.

"Although no two circus audiences are alike to the clown, I recognize three general types: fast, medium and slow. I spot them as I stand in the entrance, waiting to go on. There is a rule in the big tops that each performer or clown must be ready and waiting, one turn ahead of his own. Then, if there is any slip or accident, someone can jump in to fill the wait. So, as I stand there, I look and listen.

"If I see that the people on the seats are taking a heap of interest in what is going on, and applauding promptly, I know I have a fast audience. Some of them are so fast they are applauding a trick almost before the thing is completed.

"Another audience will take just a passive interest in the performance, and will wait until the performer makes his bow before they do any hand clapping. That's a medium audience.

"Still another will sit there, open mouthed, dull-eyed, like a lot of dumbbells, and let every act die on its feet. That is a slow audience.

"I adjust my routine to each audience. Perhaps I am doing my fake flower trick. It is one of my favorite walkarounds. I carry a bogus bouquet, and occasionally stop to offer a posy to some young lady sitting in the front row. She accepts it, whereupon I march off with the flower, leaving her holding only an empty stem. It's a simple bit, but goes big. It has to be handled carefully because the laugh is on the circus patron, and we must not offend our friends.

"With a fast audience I step up, present the posy, and make my get-away promptly, because the audience catches on instantly and I must be working another section of seats before the laugh behind me puts them wise. With a medium audience I take more time. And with a slow audience I pause a moment until the comedy sinks in. The slow audience, seeing me waiting there, finally realizes that something has been done at which it should laugh. Then it looks around, gets next, and has its laugh.

"Charles Sparks, with whose show I have clowned many years, understands mass psychology as well as I do. Right after the opening spectacle he sends in two fast runarounds. One of them is a full-sized tiger, apparently hanging onto a clown's coat tail as the latter runs around the hippodrome track. Another is a full-sized skeleton, apparently stepping on the fast moving heels of a clown. The speed and the novelty of these runarounds startles the

audience into attention and leaves it in good humor for the regular performance to follow.

"The tiger gets a laugh because it burlesques a thought that is consciously or subconsciously in everyone's mind, 'What would I do if one of those tigers in the menagerie got out and chased me?' The skeleton gets a laugh, because deep down in all of us is the old dope about the yawning graveyards and the skeletons in family closets.

Paul Wenzel, my colleague, invented these two novelties.



*Paul Wenzel was one of the best prop builders for clown gags. He is shown here with one of his creations on Sparks in 1927. Burt Wilson albums, Pfening Archives.*

"One thing a Producing Clown figures on is timeliness. Years ago, I saw a full-dress drunk leaning against a lamp post one night in Cleveland, asking the lamp post to take him home. This gave me an idea, out of which came my drunken lamp post scene, which went good for so many seasons. At another time I saw a full dress drunk sleeping in a street cleaner's can on a St. Louis street. From that I originated the full-dress drunk being carted home in the street cleaner's can. I also originated the chap in pajamas, apparently



seated in a bathtub with a cake of ice on his head, and the legend 'The Morning After the Night Before.'

"These were all timely walkarounds, because drinking was more common then than now and there was not so much sentiment against it. Booze walkarounds don't go so well now. Something to do with the army and navy goes better now. This year the clown walkarounds will probably be more or less political in subject.

"The walkaround is the clown's best bet. He is then called on to parade around the hippodrome track to break the wait while the big nets are placed for the flying acts. He has the tent to himself. Most of us clowns spend our winters trying to think up new walkarounds for the next season.

"I've clowned with one-ring 'mud' shows, or wagon shows, when the best laugh followed the elephant gag. I said to the ringmaster: "Say Mr. Ringmaster, what's that big animal with the loose leather suit?"

"That animal, you fool, is an elephant,' he answered.

"What's the big thing he carries in front of him?"

"Why that's his trunk, of course."

"Then the little thing he carries behind must be his valise,' I retorted.

"It's only when the crowd is packed to the ring banks, or I can work up close to a bunch of kids in the blue seats, that I can do any of my old talking stuff. But then I have lots of fun.

"The kids like best the very simple stuff, like the missing finger in the glove. I put on my white glove and either turn one flesh and blood finger down along my palm or put two into one finger of the glove. Then I have a terrible time finding that missing finger. The kids are tickled pink. You know why? Their mothers have played just such a game with them—the game of the missing finger—when they were babies.

"The kids like the old hoop stuff, too. I get my leg through a hoop, try to pull it over my waist, find it caught between my legs, and pull, haul, and hustle in every way before I can untangle myself. The kids laugh because they love to see their beloved clown befuddled over a thing they can see through right away.

"All kids, even crippled kids—and I've clowned for a quarter-million of them in my time—love the clown. They were born with it I guess, they and their fathers and their fathers' fathers, for a hundred generations, probably. I loved the clown when I was a kid. All kids play circus. And there's a new bunch of kids every year. That's what keeps circuses going.

"Next to a kid audience I like a woman audience. Women are quicker in response than men. They are more sympathetic and have a better sense of humor—clown humor, anyway.

"The surest fire for a combination kids and women's audience is the butterfly pantomime. This is worked either with a piece of paper looking like a butterfly tied to the end of a long string or buggy whip or on the end of a long stick held in the clown's mouth. In the first case, the clown is always on the point of catching the butterfly, but it is just where he doesn't think it will be. In the other case, the clown tries to hit the butterfly with bladders, holding one bladder in each hand. Women love the beauty of a butterfly; and turn any kid loose and he'll chase butterflies if he can see any to chase.

"They love the old hat-and-foot trick because it makes the clown seem so awkward. Every time the clown stoops down to pick up his peaked hat his foot kicks it out of his reach.

"Men like something rougher. The chair and table trick goes with

them, because it seems to have a little element of danger. I try to climb on a kitchen table, roll over it, tip it over, and let it fall on top of me. Finally I do get on the table and try to drag a chair onto it. After many catches and struggles I get the chair on top—then chair, table, and clown again fall in a heap.

"The egg-in-the-hat trick, where the smashed egg flows over the clown's face, seems to go well with men. It doesn't go so well with me! Men like to see us soak each other with bladders. It reminds



*Pete and Florence Mardo on Sparks Circus, 1923. Frederick Glasier photo, The Ringling Museum.*

them of the boxing ring. So does my new burlesque boxing match with a kangaroo.

"We used to have a good deal of German comedy. Used to dress with big wooden shoes, light yellow wigs, and so on. That has been out of style since the war. The German sausage stunt still goes, however: the dog goes into the sausage machine and the sausage links come out—just as they have for three hundred years. Such comedy goes better in Milwaukee, Cincinnati and St. Louis than it does in Scandinavian Minnesota.

"Down in Dixie I give them big bustles, 'ball the Jack' for them, and am as rough as I can be. The darkies are natural-born laughers.

"Out West any kind of horse comedy goes. One of the clown stunts on the Sparks show is a horse eighteen feet high that walks around the hippodrome track on his hind feet. The Westerners are



crazy about it. The real comedy or trick horse is also a sure-fire out West. So is the comedy mule.

"I used to hate to clown in wild Western towns. I don't mind being a target for a laugh, but it's no fun being a target for a bullet. But the old wild west crowd has disappeared.

"In Detroit, South Bend, or any big automobile town, the trick auto, which breaks down with much explosion, or tips up in front, or starts, stops, backs, and moves forward at word of command,



*Pete Mardo after he left the circus business. Ted Deppish photo, Pfening Archives.*

goes big. It goes anywhere in fact, because everybody uses motor cars.

"Some towns are good laughing towns, some are not. Paterson, New Jersey is a peach of a laughing town. The folks from the silk mills will laugh at any clown stuff. That's true of most factory towns. Boston is a good laughing town—staid, cultured old Boston. Not all laughs come from vacant minds! Appleton, Wisconsin, a little college town, is cold turkey to clown comedy. So is Dixon, Illinois.

"The female impersonator who yells loudly for her missing 'Johnnie boy' is pretty sure fire, because every mother has lost her son and every son has lost his mother sometime.

"The clown with his trained pigs goes big in factory districts, and is a frost in rural districts. That's because the factory hands think they are seeing a bit of real life. Farmers know better.

"The old stunt of fireworks in a top hat worn by a clown reading a paper and walking down the hippodrome track, takes all towners back to some Fourth-of-July experience. So they laugh.

"I always watch the crowd for an easy laugher. Once I spot a real loud haw-haw boy, I work right to him. He's my bellwether. Once I get him going, the flock follows. You'll find easy laughers in all walks in life. Line 'em up. It's good business.

"The laugh is very often on the clown. The clown business one season included the hatchet-in-the-back trick. One clown carried a big hatchet with long nails set in the cutting edge. After a dumb show argument between the hatchet-carrying clown and another Joey, the hatchet was buried, apparently, in the back of the other Joey. However, he was all right, for he had a board on his back underneath his costume. One day I forgot the board! But I never forgot it again.

"I've clowned all season for a circus—and walked home without any salary. Then I've worked all winter in a factory and gone out again the next spring with a circus. I've clowned with snow on the big top; in a cloudburst that flooded the rings, in a temperature of 105 degrees and no breath of wind under the canvas. I've traveled a half-million miles on a circus train and thousands of miles as a clown in the circus parade.

"I'm always studying out new ways to make folks laugh. I know that folks have to laugh to keep on living; and they'll meet you more than half way, if they think you have a laugh to give them. A laugh—a clean laugh—is one of God's blessings. I've helped make a lot of kids and their relatives happy, just as a lot of clowns made me happy once. Turnabout is fair play. I believe in the Golden Rule.

"And I get satisfaction from the fact that I didn't always remain a First of May. Being a First of May is what you might call a state of mind. If a first season clown is satisfied with imitating someone else, wearing sloppy costumes, being just good enough to get by without putting over anything original, he'll be a First of May, or worse, all his life.

"I got to be a Producing Clown because I wanted to be at the top of the heap, and because I learned to understand the heart of a child. I have been lucky in originating clown bits, but I have also been lucky in having a good wife. Mrs. Mardo and I have been married many years. She can ride any horse that can be saddled, buckers excepted. We're always on the same show, except when we are in our winter home in Cleveland. She designs most of my costumes, and I try out most of my comedy stuff with her.

"With all the variety and all the fun I get out of clowning, it's a little lonesome sometimes. I see thousands of folks every day, and I like them. But they do not see me. All they see is the clown make-up. I am not allowed around the front door of a circus, and towners seldom visit Clown Alley or write to a clown, as they do to a stage actor. It is partly because in the circus business we are here today and gone tomorrow; and no towners know where we have gone to, or cares. I wish I might get a letter from some towners, saying my stuff was good. That would help.

"Applause is the only gauge of professional success; and it's hard, sometimes, to make the fun both ways, for the public and for myself. But I do it right along; and being a clown is not a bad way of putting your life out at interest. My job in life is to break the waits and bring the laughs; and I do it. A lot of fellows have done less." BW

*Earl Chapin May (1873-1960) was one of the twentieth century's most prolific writers on circus subjects. His papers, a bonanza for researchers, are at the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin.*



# The Stuart Thayer Prize

The Circus Historical Society seeks to encourage the highest level of research, scholarship and writing about American circus history through the Stuart Thayer Prize. The award is named in honor of premier circus historian Stuart Thayer, whose published works on the American circus are among the most notable resources for contemporary historians.

The annual prize, awarded by a committee appointed by the Circus Historical Society president, recognizes superior works of scholarship pertaining to American circus history.



Stuart L. Thayer  
(1926-2009)

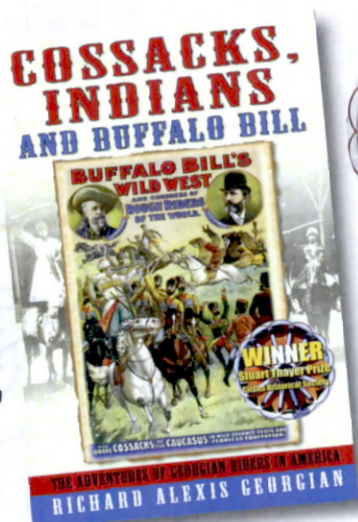
Nominations for the Stuart Thayer Prize may be submitted by current members of CHS. Works can be in any printed format including book, article, pamphlet, booklet, bibliography or catalog. Works that are loaded on a permanent website may also be considered.

The deadline for the next Stuart Thayer Prize, to be awarded at the 2014 CHS Conference, is March 15, 2014.

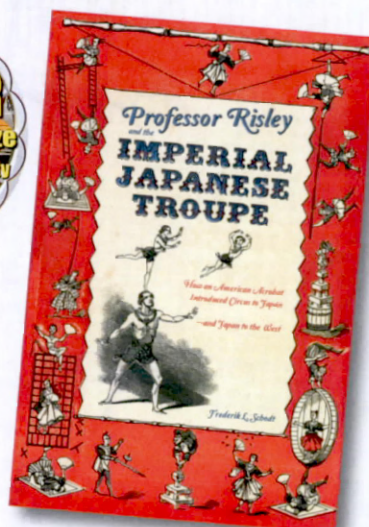
For nomination form and additional information, visit the CHS website:

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2012 Award Winner  
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## Eligibility

**Content.** A nominated work must be substantially about American circus history or a very closely related topic.

**Format.** Works may be in any printed form: book, article, pamphlet, booklet, bibliography, compendium of essays, exhibit or sales catalogue, a single essay that is part of a larger work, or an original work contained in digital format on a disk or loaded on a permanent website.

**Posthumous publication.** Works by deceased authors being published posthumously for the first time are eligible for nomination. The prize shall be awarded to the closest survivor or

an immediate family representative, or to a representative of the organization that accomplished the publication.

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Complete details and the nomination form can be downloaded from the CHS website at [www.circushistory.org/ThayerPrize.htm](http://www.circushistory.org/ThayerPrize.htm) or by writing:

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